TAFSĪR TADABBUR AL -QUR'AN

(A Reflective Commentary of the Qur'an)

INTRODUCTION:

SURAT AL-FĀTIḤAH AND THE FOUR QULS

By:
Abbas Jaffer
Masuma Jaffer

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THE WORLD
FEDERATION
OF KSIMC

TAFSĪR TADABBUR AL-QUR'AN

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INTRODUCTION: SURAT AL-FĀTIḤAH AND THE FOUR QULS

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FOREWORD

When Adam (a) was relegated to the earthly life and God accepted his repentance, He gave him and his progeny a comforting promise: 'Should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve' (Q2:38). Since that time, the guidance has come to the children of Adam uninterruptedly through God's Messengers and Scriptures. Undoubtedly, the Qur'an is the most brilliant among those guidelines of God. It sealed the revelation forever, became the most outstanding source of light for humanity, and represented the fulfilment of the promise of God to the children of Adam (a).

As children of Adam (a), we have been blessed by the fulfilment of the promise, yet after receiving the Book, we have the responsibility of reading and understanding it. It is reported from Imam al-Sadiq (a) that, "The Qur'an is the trust of God (given) to His creation; therefore it is expected from every Muslim to look at this trust and to recite (a minimum of) 50 verses of it every day."[1] And it is not mere recitation which is expected, but understanding and reflection as well. As Imam Ali (a) has stated, "Beware! There is no benefit in a recitation in which there is no deliberation."[2]

The present book authored skilfully and with deep knowledge of the Qur'an by Abbas and Masuma Jaffer helps us to understand the Qur'an better and makes it easy to reflect on its verses. Anyone familiar with *tafsīr* literature would immediately realize the novel and innovative method used in this work which makes the interpretation of the Qur'an accessible to a wide range of readers. It not only provides a lucid exposition of the verses of the Qur'an, but delves into discussions on vocabulary, etymology, grammar and syntax of the verses in such a simple and comprehensible way that readers with no knowledge of Arabic and no background in Qur'anic studies will find it easy to understand.

Yet there is something more to this work which is missing in almost all other *tafsīr* literature. Under the heading 'Reflective Learning', it tries to find out the connection of every verse to our daily life and our

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[1] *Kāfī*, 2/609.

[2] *Kāfī*, 1/36.

personal experience. It is reported from Imam al-Husayn (a) that, "The Book of God is based on four things: expression, allusion, subtleties, and realities. The expression is for the common people, the allusion is for the elite, the subtleties are for the friends of God, and the realities are for the prophets."[3] *Tafsīr* literature is to do with the interpretation of the expression of the Qur'an. However, the 'reflective learning' in this work tries to open a door for the reader to the underlying allusions in every verse in the most contemporary and understandable manner.

Thus, to all those who are willing to understand the interpretation of the expressions of the Qur'an, and yet are eager to go beyond that and are enthusiastic to get some allusions from the Qur'an for their everyday life, reading this work will be extremely helpful.

Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour
Tehran, May 2021

[3] *Jāmi' al-Akhbār*, 1/41.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

(This is) a Scripture that We have revealed unto you, full of blessing, that they may ponder its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect (38:29)

The Qur'an continuously urges its readers to reflect upon its message. The World Federation as part of its publication and propagation of faith has endeavored over the years to support projects and initiatives that promote reflecting on the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

In 1993, the Islamic Education Board (IEB) of The World Federation published its first ever Qur'anic reflective book targeted at madrasah students, under the title '*Subḥānallāh – The wonders of creation in the Holy Qur'an*'. The objective then was to produce a concise book which would portray those parts of the Holy Qur'an, which deal with the wonders of creation and human experience.

In 2004, IEB published another book titled: "*Noble Qur'an' - 40 Ahadith*", as part of a series of booklets of 40 *Ahadith* on different subjects. The *Ahadith* that were selected from various sources were short and simple, and therefore easy to understand and memorise. They were focused on the merits and importance of various matters such as reading, reflecting, and respecting, that have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

In 2005, IEB published the English version of the '*Introduction to the Science of Tafsīr of the Qur'an*' by Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, translated by Shaykh Saleem Bhimji.

In 2010, the first major thematic exegesis of the Holy Qur'an '*Message of the Qur'an*' Volume 1 compiled by a group of Muslim scholars under the guidance of Ayatullah Al-Uzma Shaykh Nasir Makarim Shirazi was published by The World Federation in English translated by Shaykh Saleem Bhimji and edited by Abbas Jaffer. This work introduced a new style of exegesis of the Noble Qur'an to the English-speaking world. By taking a thematic approach to the study of the Verses of the Qur'an the author was able to unlock the sublime teachings of the Qur'an in a lucid and easy to understand manner.

In 2013, The World Federation took the reflective practices on the Holy Qur'an to the madrasah classroom by publishing the Tarbiyah Curriculum Framework for Madrasah Education through its Madrasah Center of Excellence (MCE), where the entire curriculum was based on a Qur'anic worldview as expounded by the Ahlul Bayt (a). There was a recognition that madaris whilst dwelling in recitation, *tajwīd*, and limited reflections missed the fundamental point of applying a Qur'anic reflective approach in our lives. Thus, the entire curriculum that has more than 600 lessons begins each lesson with a verse of the Holy Qur'an and how this applies to the lesson in consideration, be it *fiqh*, history, *akhlāq*, or *aqā'īd*.

By the Grace of Allah (swt), in 2021, The World Federation Islamic Education Department is once again blessed with the opportunity to facilitate a new Qur'anic publication, titled: "*Tafsīr Tadabbur al-Qur'an*" ('A Reflective Commentary of the Qur'an') by Abbas and Masuma Jaffer. As alluded to in the foreword to this book, there is something more to this *tafsīr*, which is missing in other *tafsīr* literature. Under the heading 'Reflective Learning', it tries to explore the connection of every verse to our daily life and personal experience. It is this distinguishing practical dimension of the *tafsīr* at hand that readers with no knowledge of Arabic, nor any background in Qur'anic studies - will find easy to understand.

The World Federation is grateful to the co-authors and all those who have supported in the publication of this first volume, with the hope and prayers that future volumes will continue to add to the further reflective learnings from the rest of the chapters of the Holy Qur'an, Inshallāh.

Safder Jaffer
President
The World Federation of KSIMC
25th September 2021

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is the Book, there is no doubt in it,
a guidance to the God-wary. (Q2:2)

The Holy Qur'an is an unprecedented Divine Book, revealed by the Almighty unto the Holy Prophet (s) both in one go – in keeping with the norm of previous Divine scriptures which were revealed in this manner[1] – and in a gradual mode over the span of the twenty three years of the mission of the Holy Prophet (s).

In order to fathom its true reality, a wise person would start with the Holy Qur'an itself to see how it defines itself. In the second verse of the second chapter, Allah explains that it is a lofty and guarded scripture, which has no statement in it that would raise doubts. Its goal is to guide those whose hearts are open to guidance and those who observe all the aspects of its message, both on the inner and exterior planes.

The above insights are amongst many that are going to be shared in the framework of this blessed *tafsīr* project embarked upon by honourable scholars Sh Abbas Jaffer and Dr Masuma Jaffer. Under the supervision of Sh Dr Muhammad Saeed Bahmanpour, along with the collaborative expert feedback from Sh Dr Tahir Ridha Jaffer, our two authors have adopted a methodology of compiling a *tafsīr* which combines some of the profound and insightful content of several contemporary QurPanic commentaries by eminent authorities in the field.

In the context of illustrating the progressive developmental effect of the Holy Qur'an that Allah (SWT) alludes to[2] - the authors have uniquely explained how this Divine Book informs, warns and awakens mankind through advice (*maw'iẓah*) and prescribing cures (*shifā'*) for maladies of the heart

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[1] Q3:3 He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel.

[2] Q10:57 O mankind!. There has indeed come to you advice from your Lord, and a healing for what [disease] is in the breasts, and a guidance and a mercy for the believers.

and mind (such as ignorance, arrogance, and spiritual vices), thereby guiding humanity to what is righteous and felicitous in both private and public life. This is a manifestation of the concept of guidance (*hudā*), through which one qualifies to receive a special Divine Reward and Mercy (*raḥmah*).

Indeed, reflection upon the pearls which are the meanings of the Holy Qur'an and acting upon them is the path to the greatest Divine Blessings that are much higher than any worldly, transient and material acquisitions,[3] whereby the Most Exalted (praise be to Him) elevates one's spirit to the higher lofty realms of eternal realities.

When approached, the Islamic Education Department was delighted to accept the offer of collaboration by Sh Abbas Jaffer and Dr Masuma Jaffer, and is extremely honoured to facilitate this very needed project for the English-speaking community, which will address many contemporary issues and be a resource for understanding the deep meanings of the verses of the Holy QurÞan compiled from the works of scholars who are specialists in QurÞanic exegesis.

This preliminarily volume containing the exegesis of five often recited chapters of the QurÞan will be the forerunner to the *tafsīr* of the whole Qur'ān. God willing, the *tafsīr* of the 30th *juz'* will be published next year.

This resource will be indispensable for those who do not speak Arabic and Persian, but have a thirst for knowledge, especially those who lecture and teach.

We pray for Allah to bless these noble efforts of our scholars, and to reward them with the good of both worlds.

For any enquiries or comments, kindly write to: islamiceducation@world-federation.org.

Islamic Education Department
The World Federation of KSIMC
24th September 2021 – 16th Safar 1443 AH.

[3] Q10:58 Say, 'In Allah's grace and His mercy - let them rejoice in that! It is better than what they amass.'

TADABBUR AL-QUR'AN

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the last and most comprehensive revelation of God to mankind. It was the declared miracle of Prophet Muhammad (s) to his nation. It came at the end of a long series of communications that God had revealed to different Prophets (a) in the course of human history. The Qur'an not only confirms what was contained in previous scriptures but is an authority and guardian (*muhaymin*) over them all (Q5:48).

The Qur'an is a living connection between God and His creation. It is a book of guidance and wisdom in the form of laws, admonitions, histories, parables, and rational argument. About this great bounty and blessing to mankind, Q10:57 states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ
وَشِفَاءٌ لِمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

O mankind! There has indeed come to you advice from your Lord, and a healing for what [disease] is in the breasts, and a guidance and a mercy for the believers.

It is no wonder that a tradition from Imam al-Sajjad (a) states: If I was alone in the world, I would not be lonely as long as the Qur'an was by my side.[4]

ABOUT THIS COMPILATION

This compilation draws on the work of several exegetes and exegeses, with an emphasis on the interpretation offered by the followers of the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (a). It is an attempt to present a simple *tafsīr* of the Qur'an and encourage interactive reading and reflection on God's word.

Many reports state that the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) would read the Qur'an in an interactive manner, for instance: When Imam al-Ridha (a) would finish reciting Surat al-Ikhlāṣ, he would say three times, "Thus is Allah, our Lord." When he would recite a verse that stated, 'O you who believe', he would say silently, "Labbayk, my Lord!" And when he would

[4] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/602.

finish Surat al-Kāfirūn, he would say, "My Lord is Allah, and my religion is Islam."[5]

Furthermore, in the chapter that is named after the Prophet (s) himself, God invites us to ponder over the Qur'an to demonstrate that our hearts are open and receptive to His message. Q47:24 states:

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

Do they not reflect on the Qur'an, or are there locks on the hearts?

It is in obedience to this call from God that we have called our humble attempt at a reflective *tafsīr*, *Tadabbur al-Qur'an* (Reflection on the Qur'an).

A NOTE ON *TADABBUR* (REFLECTION)

There is a vast difference between *tadabbur* and *tafsīr*. *Tafsīr* is to do with revealing the meaning of a verse. This was the task of the Prophet (s) and his righteous successors (a), and was thereafter undertaken by specialist scholars. On the other hand, *tadabbur* means reflection and pondering about the message of a verse. It involves internalizing the import of the verse, taking admonition, and making changes thereafter. *Tadabbur* is a divine injunction for all.

THE FORMAT OF THE WORK

1. Each chapter begins with the text and its translation, followed by a brief introduction, a background of its revelation, the suggested link to the previous chapter, and the merits of its recitation as mentioned in the traditions. Of course, these merits are only deserved by the one who reads the chapter with sincerity and applies its message in his life.
2. Thereafter, the *tafsīr* of a verse or set of verses is presented, with a brief explanation of the relevant vocabulary. At the end of each portion of *tafsīr*, we have provided a brief summary of the verses under consideration, and a suggestion for reflective learning. The reader may choose other aspects of the verse for reflection as well. We have only made suggestions about action points occasionally because these are different for every-body. However, there is no doubt that tadabbur should be followed by action and change.
3. Diacritical marks have been kept at a minimum to facilitate easy reading.

[5] Ṣadūq, *'Uyūn al-Akhbār*, 2/44.

4. The Arabic text of the relevant traditions has been included in the footnotes for those who may be interested. Of course, evaluating the soundness of hadith is a discipline in itself, and for this reason we have provided full references of the traditions we have used.

In this preliminary volume, only five chapters have been examined: al-Fātiḥah, al-Kāfirūn, al-Ikhlāṣ, al-Falaq, and al-Nās. These surahs are well-known, memorized, and frequently recited by the Muslims and so we felt that it would be of benefit to begin with a deeper study of them.

By God's permission, this volume will be a forerunner to the *tafsīr* of the entire QurPan, beginning with the 30th section.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we acknowledge that this work is a result of God's mercy and grace, without which we would not have completed this volume. We ask for His continual guidance in the course of this project.

We are indebted to the diligent review and valuable suggestions of Sh Mohammed Saeed Bahmanpour and Sh Tahir Ridha Jaffer. They have always been at hand to offer guidance in a field in which they have great experience and knowledge.

We are also grateful to The World Federation of KSIMC for publishing the work. We would like to thank Sh Murtada Alidina and Sh Afzal Merali of the Islamic Education Department for their constant support and encouragement of this project.

This work is a collaborative effort by the two of us. We have studied the Qur'an to some small degree over the years. We wished to do something for each other as a tribute to our lives together. So we decided to attempt to delve deeper into the ocean of wisdom that exists in this living miracle. We wanted to do this so that we could apply its guidance in our lives.

We hope that others will benefit from this work also, and thereby together we can hasten the reappearance of our Imam (af).

'Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed, You are all-Hearing, all-Knowing.'

Abbas Jaffer
Masuma Jaffer
London, May 2021

SURAT AL-FĀTIḤAH
THE OPENING (1)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾ الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾
مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾ اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. [1] *All [grateful] praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds.* [2] *The Beneficent, the Merciful.* [3] *Master of the Day of Judgment.* [4] *You [alone] do we worship, and You [alone] do we ask for help.* [5] *Guide us on the straight (correct) path.* [6] *The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours. Not [the path] of those upon whom Your wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray.* [7]

INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Fātiḥah (1) is the opening chapter of the Qur'an. It was the 5th chapter to be revealed.[1] It has seven verses and was revealed in Makka, and according to some reports, once again in Madina. A number of exegetes consider it to be the first complete chapter to be revealed.[2]

More than ten different names have been given for this chapter by the Prophet (s) and the Imams (a), the most important of which are:

1. *Fātiḥat al-kitāb* (the opening of the book). The name comes from the fact that it is the first chapter of the Qur'an as well as the opening of the daily prayer.[3] This name was used for the surah even at the time of the Prophet (s), indicating that the sequence of the Qur'an was probably determined during his lifetime.

---

[1] Ma'rifat, *'Ulūm-i Qur'ānī*, p. 90.

[2] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/87.

[3] Ibid.

2. *Al-Ḥamd* (grateful praise). This is a common reference to the chapter in the traditions, and is derived from the famous phrase at the opening of the second verse, *alḥamdu lillāh.*
3. *Umm al-kitāb* (the mother of the book). The name is a reference to the fact that it stands above the rest of the chapters of the Qur'an, and contains God's greatest name. It has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a) that: The greatest name (*ism al-aʿẓam*) of God is interspersed in *umm al-kitāb.*[4]
4. *Al-sabʿa al-mathānī* (the seven oft-repeated [verses]. This is because Surat al-Ḥamd contains seven (*sabʿa*) verses including the *basmalah.* And because it was revealed twice, once in Makka and once in Madina, and it is recited twice in every prayer (minimum ten times daily), it is called the 'oft-repeated (*mathānī*)' verses.[5] Q15:87 states:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ

We have indeed granted you the seven oft-repeated verses and the grand Qur'an.

In Surat al-Fātiḥah, the three principal tenets of belief (*ʿaqāʾid*) have been summarized:

1. Unicity of God (*tawḥīd*),
2. Prophethood (*nabuwwah*), and
3. Resurrection (*maʿād*).

If these tenets are understood, servanthood (*ʿubūdiyyah*) would naturally follow, and the verses of the chapter, expressed as the speech of the servants, would be recited sincerely.

The chapter can be divided into three sections:

1. The introduction to God, the Almighty, through His name Allah, which encompasses all His attributes. Thereafter, verses recount His attributes of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*).
2. The next section describes the covenant between the believer and God, of sincere worship and complete reliance.

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[4] Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-Aʿmāl*, p. 104.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – اِسْمُ اللهِ الْأَعْظَمُ مُقَطَّعٌ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ.

[5] Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasāʾil*, 4/157.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – وَإِنَّمَا سُمِّيَتِ الْمَثَانِيَ لِأَنَّهَا تُثَنَّى فِي الرَّكْعَتَيْنِ.

3. In the final section there is a supplication and plea for guidance on the straight path.

   In this regard, a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: Surat al-Ḥamd is the chapter whose beginning is praise (*taḥmīd*), its middle is sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), and its ending is supplication (*du'ā'*).[6]

The relationship between Surat al-Fātiḥah and the rest of the Qur'an is that of a prayer and an answer. Surat al-Fātiḥah teaches the etiquette of invoking God: one should first recite the *basmalah*, then recognize and praise Allah, thereafter, pledge servitude, and then ask for one's desire; in this case, the desire is expressed for the greatest of bounties, which is the gift of guidance. The rest of the chapters of the Qur'an form God's answer to this perfect prayer through instructive parables, histories of the Prophets (s) and their communities, theological proofs, legislative commands, and moral teachings. Indeed, God states this fact in the very opening of the next chapter. Q2:2 states:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is the Book about which there is no doubt;
a guidance for the God-wary.

LINK TO THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

As it is the opening chapter of the Qur'an, Surat al-Fātiḥah has no previous chapter before it. However, keeping in mind the recommendation to resume a new recital of the Qur'an on its completion, the previous surah can be considered to be Surat al-Nās.

Surat al-Nās instructs man to seek refuge in God from the misguidance of Shaytan, and Surat al-Fātiḥah teaches man to proactively seek true guidance, and avoid the path of those who have incurred God's wrath and those who have gone astray.

Both chapters emphasize the same attributes of God; that He is the *Rabb*, *Malik* (or *Mālik*) and the only deity worthy of worship.

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[6] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 89/235.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – السُّورَةُ الَّتِي أَوَّلُهَا تَحْمِيدٌ وَأَوْسَطُهَا إِخْلَاصٌ وَآخِرُهَا دُعَاءٌ سُورَةُ الْحَمْدِ.

MERITS OF THE CHAPTER

- Surat al-Fātiḥah must be recited in each of the first two units of every obligatory and optional prayer for the prayer to be valid. A famous tradition from the Prophet (s) states: There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the *Fātiḥat al-kitāb.*[7]

  In optional prayers, it suffices to recite just Surat al-Fātiḥah. In this regard, a tradition from the Prophet (s) states: *Umm al-Qur'an* can replace other chapters but it cannot be replaced by them.[8]

- A tradition from Imam al-Ridha (a) states: ...The reason [every] prayer begins with Surat al-Ḥamd, rather than any other chapter, is because there is no passage in the Qur'an in which goodness and wisdom has been gathered like it has been gathered in Surat al-Ḥamd.[9]

  A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: God, the Almighty, informed me, "I have divided the *Fātiḥat al-kitāb* between me and My servant; half of it is for Me and half of it is for My servant, and My servant shall receive whatever he asks for."

  When the servant says, "*In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful*", God, the Almighty, responds, "My servant began with My Name, so it becomes incumbent on Me to complete his affairs for him and bless him in his endeavours."

  And when he says, "*All [grateful] praise is due to God, Lord of the worlds*", God, the Almighty, responds, "My servant has praised Me, and realizes that the blessings he possesses have come from Me, and the misfortune that I have averted from him is from My favour. I call you [angels] to all witness that I shall add the blessings of the Hereafter to the blessings of this world for him, and I shall avert the misfortunes of the Hereafter from him just as I have averted from him the misfortunes of this world.

  And when he says, "*The Beneficent, the Merciful,*" God, the Almighty, responds, "My servant has testified that I am the Beneficent, the

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[7] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il,* 4/732; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* 18,745.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – لا صَلاةَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَقْرَأْ بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ.

[8] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān,* 1/87.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – أُمُّ الْقُرْآنِ عِوَضٌ عَنْ غَيْرِهَا، وَلَيْسَ غَيْرُهَا عِوَضًا عَنْهَا.

[9] Ṣadūq, *al-Faqīh,* 1/310; 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il,* 6/38.

عَنِ الرِّضَا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلامُ) – إِنَّمَا بُدِئَ بِالْحَمْدِ دُونَ سَائِرِ السُّوَرِ، لِأَنَّهُ لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ وَالْكَلامِ جُمِعَ فِيهِ مِنْ جَوَامِعِ الْخَيْرِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ مَا جُمِعَ فِي سُورَةِ الْحَمْدِ.

Merciful. I call you all to witness that I will certainly increase his share of My mercy and certainly expand his allocation from My blessings."

And when he says, "*Master of the Day of Judgment,*" God, the Almighty, responds, "I call you all to witness that just as he acknowledges that I am the Master of the Day of Judgment, I shall certainly make his accounting easy on the Day of Reckoning, and I shall certainly overlook his sinful acts."

And when he says, "*You [alone] do we worship,*" God, the Almighty, responds, "My servant spoke the truth. He does worship only Me. I call you all to witness that in return for this [sincere] worship, I shall reward him in such a way that everyone who opposed him in his worship of Me will envy him."

And when he says, "*and You [alone] do we ask for help,*" God, the Almighty, responds, "My servant has asked Me for help and turned to Me. I call you all to witness that I will support him in his affairs, and come to his aid when he is in hardship, and on the Day when he will be in difficulties, I will take his hand."

And when he says, "*Guide us on the straight (correct) path...*" to the end of the chapter, God, the Almighty, responds, "This is [granted] for My servant, and My servant shall have what he seeks. I have responded to My servant, granted his wishes, and secured him from what he fears."[10]

This beautiful narration highlights the fact that God's connection to His creation is constant and intimate.

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[10] Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 4/327; *'Uyūn Akhbār*, 1/300.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – قَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: قَسَمْتُ فَاتِحَةَ الْكِتَابِ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي، فَنِصْفُهَا لِي وَنِصْفُهَا لِعَبْدِي، وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ

إِذَا قَالَ الْعَبْدُ: «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ» قَالَ اللهُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ: بَدَأَ عَبْدِي بِاسْمِي، وَحَقٌّ عَلَيَّ أَنْ أُتَمِّمَ لَهُ أُمُورَهُ وَأُبَارِكَ لَهُ فِي أَحْوَالِهِ،

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) قَالَ اللهُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ: حَمِدَنِي عَبْدِي، وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ النِّعَمَ الَّتِي لَهُ مِنْ عِنْدِي، وَأَنَّ الْبَلَايَا الَّتِي دَفَعْتُ عَنْهُ بِطَوْلِي،

أُشْهِدُكُمْ أَنِّي أُضِيفُ لَهُ إِلَى نِعَمِ الدُّنْيَا نِعَمَ الْآخِرَةِ، وَأَدْفَعُ عَنْهُ بَلَايَا الْآخِرَةِ كَمَا دَفَعْتُ عَنْهُ بَلَايَا الدُّنْيَا،

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ) قَالَ اللهُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ: شَهِدَ لِي بِأَنِّي الرَّحْمٰنُ الرَّحِيمُ، أُشْهِدُكُمْ لَأُوَفِّرَنَّ مِنْ رَحْمَتِي حَظَّهُ، وَلَأُجْزِلَنَّ مِنْ عَطَائِي نَصِيبَهُ،

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ) قَالَ اللهُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ: أُشْهِدُكُمْ – كَمَا اعْتَرَفَ عَبْدِي – أَنِّي مَالِكُ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ، لَأُسَهِّلَنَّ يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ حِسَابَهُ،

وَلَأَتَجَاوَزَنَّ عَنْ سَيِّئَاتِهِ.

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ) قَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: صَدَقَ عَبْدِي إِيَّايَ يَعْبُدُ، أُشْهِدُكُمْ لَأُثِيبَنَّهُ عَلَى عِبَادَتِهِ ثَوَابًا يَغْبِطُهُ كُلُّ مَنْ خَالَفَهُ فِي عِبَادَتِهِ لِي،

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ) قَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: بِيَ اسْتَعَانَ وَإِلَيَّ الْتَجَأَ، أُشْهِدُكُمْ لَأُعِينَنَّهُ عَلَى أَمْرِهِ وَلَأُغِيثَنَّهُ فِي شَدَائِدِهِ، وَلَآخُذَنَّ بِيَدِهِ يَوْمَ نَوَائِبِهِ،

فَإِذَا قَالَ: (اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ) إِلَى آخِرِ السُّورَةِ، قَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ:

هٰذَا لِعَبْدِي، وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ، فَقَدْ اسْتَجَبْتُ لِعَبْدِي، وَأَعْطَيْتُهُ مَا أَمَّلَ، وَآمَنْتُهُ مِمَّا مِنْهُ وَجِلَ.

MERITS OF RECITATION

- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states that this is the best chapter of the Qur'an, and its recitation carries the reward of reciting two-thirds of the Qur'an, and in another report, the reward of reciting the whole of the Qur'an.[11]
- A tradition from Imam al-Baqir (a) states: The one who is not cured by (reciting) Surat al-Ḥamd will not be cured by anything else.[12] It is possible that this narration is referring to the diseases of the heart rather than the body.

THE MERITS OF *BASMALAH*

- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Whoever wants to be secure from the nineteen guardians of Hell, should recited the *basmalah*, for it has nineteen letters. Every letter of the phrase will be a shield from one of the guardians.[13] These guardians have been mentioned in Q74:30:

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ

Over it (hellfire) are nineteen [guardians].

- Another tradition from the Prophet (s) states: When the teacher instructs a child, "Say: *Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*", and the child repeats, "*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*", God writes immunity [from hellfire] for the child, immunity for his parents, and immunity for the teacher.[14]
- A tradition from the Prophet (s) also states: When a servant recites, '*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*' before going to sleep, God says,

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[11] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/88; Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, 1/556.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – فَاتِحَةُ الْكِتَابِ تَعْدِلُ ثُلُثَيِ الْقُرْآنِ [... كَأَنَّمَا قَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ].

[12] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/624.

عَنِ الْبَاقِرِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – مَنْ لَمْ يُبْرِئْهُ الْحَمْدُ، لَمْ يُبْرِئْهُ شَيْءٌ.

[13] Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 4/387.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – مَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَجِّيَهُ اللهُ مِنَ الزَّبَانِيَةِ التِّسْعَةَ عَشَرَ، فَلْيَقْرَأْ: «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ»، فَإِنَّهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ حَرْفًا، لِيَجْعَلَ اللهُ كُلَّ حَرْفٍ مِنْهَا جُنَّةً مِنْ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمْ.

[14] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 6/169.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – أَنَّهُ إِذَا قَالَ الْمُعَلِّمُ لِلصَّبِيِّ قُلْ: «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ»، فَقَالَ الصَّبِيُّ: «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ»، كَتَبَ اللهُ بَرَاءَةً لِلصَّبِيِّ وَبَرَاءَةً لِأَبَوَيْهِ وَبَرَاءَةً لِلْمُعَلِّمِ.

"O My angels, record [reward for] every breath he takes until the morning."[15]

- Beginning every work in the name of God is highly recommended. It is the *sunnah* (practice) of God, Who has begun every chapter of His Book with the *basmalah*, except Surat al-Tawbah (9).

  In this manner, servants are taught to observe this practice in all their activities.

  Sometimes, the number 786, which is the total of the letters of the *basmalah* according to the *abjad* numerology system, is used as an abbreviation, but there is no particular recommendation for this practice in Shi'i traditions.

  The practice of starting with the *basmalah* ensures that deeds become Godly and blessed by Allah. Then, these works would persist and not be nullified or remain unfinished. Indeed, when any transient, limited, and insignificant act is connected to God, it becomes everlasting, unlimited, and significant.

  A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Any work that is not begun with the *basmalah* is cut off from goodness (*abtar*).[16] For this reason Muslims are encouraged to begin every act, such as going out of the home, making supplications, eating food, and even sleep, with *basmalah*.

EXEGESIS

VERSE 1

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.[1]

1.1 This important verse, abbreviated from the first four consonants of the phrase to *basmalah* (بَسْمَلَة), occurs 114 times in the Qur'an. It is found at the head of every chapter except Surat al-Tawbah, and appears twice in Surat al-Naml (the second time in Q27:30).

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[15] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 89/258.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – إِذَا قَالَ الْعَبْدُ عِنْدَ مَنَامِهِ: «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ»، يَقُولُ اللهُ مَلَائِكَتِي اُكْتُبُوا نَفَسَهُ إِلَى الصَّبَاحِ.

[16] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 89/242.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – كُلُّ أَمْرٍ ذِي بَالٍ لَمْ يُذْكَرْ فِيهِ «بِسْمِ اللهِ» فَهُوَ أَبْتَرُ.

1.2 The *basmalah* in the beginning of the Qur'an and at the head of every surah indicates that the Qur'an and the contents of every chapter are a manifestation of God's mercy.

1.3 There is a difference of opinion amongst Muslims about the inclusion of the *basmalah* in the beginning of the chapters of the Qur'an. The main views are the following:

The Shafi'is and Hanbalis believe the *basmalah* to be part of only Surat al-Ḥamd and not any other chapter, except verse 30 of Surat al-Naml.[17]

The Malikis and Hanafis do not consider the *basmalah* to be part of revelation, except in verse 30 of Surat al-Naml. However, in the daily prayers, they allow its recitation silently before Surat al-Ḥamd.[18]

However, the Shi'a Imamis maintain that every chapter (except for al-Tawbah) was revealed with a *basmalah*. God has divided His revelation into discrete parts called surahs, each with a different theme, and each beginning with a *basmalah* that is linked to the theme. In the case of Surat al-Ḥamd, which contains a supplication, the *basmalah* is taught to be the opening phrase of every successful prayer.[19]

1.4 [*Bi* (بِ, in, with)]. The preposition at the head of the *basmalah* is related to the implied verb, 'I begin', indicating the intention to seek Divine help, which is reiterated in the fifth verse, إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِين (*You alone do we ask for help*).

1.5 In the *tafsīr* attributed to Imam al-Askari (a) he is reported to have said: *Bismillāh* means, "I seek God's help in every single thing I do."[20]

1.6 [*Ism* (إِسْم, name)]: There are two possibilities for the root of this term:

i) *wasama*, meaning a sign, because the name of a thing points to it and identifies it.

ii) *samawa*, meaning superiority and dominance, because the name of everything encompasses and governs it. (It is for this reason that parents must take care to give their children good names.

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[17] Nawawī, *al-Majmū'*, 3/334.

[18] Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 1/93.

[19] *al-Mīzān*, 1/17.

[20] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 7/169.

عَنِ الْعَسْكَرِيِّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «بِسْمِ اللهِ» أَيْ أَسْتَعِينُ عَلَى أُمُورِي كُلِّهَا بِاللهِ.

A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: The right of a child over his or her parents is that they give them a good name.[21])

In any case, some scholars consider the second possibility to be the stronger one, because the plural of *ism* is *asmā'*, which conforms to this root.[22]

1.7 [Allah (الله, God)]: The name Allah is known as the *Lafẓ al-Jalālah* (the word of Majesty), and is exclusive to God, referring to His exalted Essence. It is the most frequently used name for God in the Qur'an, occurring almost 2,700 times.

1.8 Each of the names of God (over 140 are mentioned in the Qur'an) points to an attribute of His infinite perfection from one aspect. However, the name 'Allah' encapsulates all His perfect attributes, and every Divine Name points to it.

1.9 According to some reports, the name 'Allah' is the greatest name of God (*ism al-a'ẓam*).[23] While according to others, the entire *basmalah* is the *ism al-a'ẓam*. A tradition from Imam al-Ridha (a) states: The phrase '*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*' is closer to the greatest name of God (*ism al-a'ẓam*) than the white of the eye is to its black part.[24]

1.10 The name 'Allah' was known in pre-Islamic times, and was used by the idolaters. Q43:87 states:

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللهُ

And if you should ask them who created them,
they would certainly say: Allah...

Originally this term was *al-Ilāh* (the worshipped), and the *hamza* was later assimilated to give the name Allah. *Ilāh* is the verbal noun of *aliha*, which means 'to worship', or 'be captivated', and because it has the meaning of the passive participle (*ism al-maf'ūl*), Allah means 'One who is worshipped (*ma'būd*)', or 'About Whom all are perplexed and captivated (*mutaḥayyirun fīhi*)'.[25] Imam al-Sajjad (a) uses the

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[21] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying no. 399.

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – حَقُّ الْوَلَدِ عَلَى الْوَالِدِ أَنْ يُحْسِنَ اسْمَهُ.

[22] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/91.

[23] Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī*, 1/81; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 14/28.

[24] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 6/60.

عَنِ الرِّضَا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ» أَقْرَبُ إِلَى اسْمِ اللهِ الْأَعْظَمِ مِنْ بَيَاضِ الْعَيْنِ إِلَى سَوَادِهَا.

[25] Javādī-Āmolī, *Tasnīm*, 1/215.

second meaning in one of his supplications, saying: "O Allah, the hearts of the humble are captivated by you."[26]

1.11 Many scholars consider 'Allah' to be a proper noun because it is never used as an adjective to any other name, nor is a verb derived from it used to describe other names.[27] It is used as the Arabic equivalent of God by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (for example in the Arabic Bible).

1.12 [*Al-Raḥmān* الرَّحْمٰن and *al-Raḥīm* الرَّحِيم (merciful)]. Derived from the root *r-ḥ-m,* both these two names are hyperbolic, or intensive, forms (*al-ṣīghah al-mubālaghah*) of the noun, *raḥmah* (mercy). However, *raḥmah* is more than mercy in the meaning of compassion, for example when a soldier chooses to spare his enemy, or when one shows pity on someone less fortunate. It has a wider meaning, which is the desire to provide assistance to someone who is suffering from a deficiency which he cannot remove by himself.

As an attribute of God it denotes granting assistance in order to fulfil every need of the creation to achieve their potential.[28]

1.13 *Raḥmah* includes unconditional care, love and mercy. For example, the womb of the mother is called *raḥim* because she provides everything the baby needs, even as the baby causes her pain and distress.

1.14 These two attributes may have been chosen over God's other attributes because it is more fitting to begin every work by relying on that attribute which encompasses everything else in creation as well. Q7:156 states:

وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

... And My mercy embraces all things...

1.15 Although both *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* are attributes of God derived from *raḥmah,* the reason *al-Raḥmān* precedes *al-Raḥīm* is because *al-Raḥmān* is a name reserved solely for God, while *al-Raḥīm* can refer to others as well.[29]

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[26] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 97/264, *Ziyārat Amīnullāh* of Imam Ali (a).

اَللّٰهُمَّ إِنَّ قُلُوبَ الْمُخْبِتِينَ إِلَيْكَ وَالِهَةٌ.

[27] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 1/19.

[28] Ibid, 1/20.

[29] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/94.

A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: *al-Raḥmān* is a specific attribute [of God] which encompasses everything, while *al-Raḥīm* is a general attribute which encompasses a specific group.[30]

1.16 *Al-Raḥmān* denotes the One whose widespread and general mercy surrounds all of mankind, both believers and disbelievers. The manifestation of this mercy is God's role as Sustainer, Lord, Creator of the natural order, Healer, Responder to prayers, etc.

1.17 *Al-Raḥīm* denotes God's eternal and continuous mercy on His creation. The manifestation of this mercy is God's legislative guidance, His guardianship, His intercession, His eternal rewards in heaven for those who were not defiant and submitted to the truth, etc.

Therefore, as stated by Imam al-Sadiq (a) in one narration, *al-Raḥmān* denotes God's general mercy to all of His creation, and *al-Raḥīm* denotes His special and perpetual mercy to those who believe in Him.[31] And this special mercy will be manifested most clearly on the Day of Judgment.

1.18 In fact, God's *raḥmah* will be more manifest on the Day of Judgment than it has ever been before. A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: God, the Almighty, has one-hundred doors of mercy, one of which He sent down to the earth and distributed amongst His creation. Through this, they display care and mercy to one another. He kept the other ninety-nine with Himself and will manifest them to His servants on the Day of Resurrection.[32]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, beginning every action with the *basmalah* enables the believer to fulfil the purpose of his creation which is to perform every act for the pleasure of God, in the manner that He has instructed. And in this way, everything he does becomes an act of worship as stated in Q51:56:

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[30] Ḥuwayzī , *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, 1/14.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «الرَّحْمٰنُ» اسْمٌ خاصٌّ بِصِفَةٍ عَامَّةٍ، وَ«الرَّحِيمُ» اسْمٌ عَامٌّ بِصِفَةٍ خاصَّةٍ.

[31] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/114.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «الرَّحْمٰنُ» بِجَمِيعِ خَلْقِهِ، وَ«الرَّحِيمُ» بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ خاصَّةً.

[32] Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī*, 1/82.

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – إِنَّ لِلّٰهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مِائَةَ رَحْمَةٍ أَنْزَلَ مِنْهَا وَاحِدَةً إِلَى الْأَرْضِ، فَقَسَّمَهَا بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ، فَبِهَا يَتَعَاطَفُونَ وَيَتَرَاحَمُونَ، وَأَخَّرَ تِسْعًا وَتِسْعِينَ لِنَفْسِهِ يَرْحَمُ بِهَا عِبَادَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I have not created the jinn *and the men*
except that they should worship me

Beginning every action with God's name naturally forestalls a person from committing a deed that would displease Him. Thus, this practice is an important pledge and self-reminder to avoid conduct that would displease Allah.

The *basmalah* is the emblem and brand of a Muslim. A tradition states that when Imam al-Ridha (a) was asked about the meaning of *bismillāh*, he said: When the speaker utters the *basmalah*, it means, "I mark myself with a brand (*al-simah*) from the brands of God, the Almighty. And that is true servitude (*al-ʿubūdiyyah*)."[33]

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

The help we need in the action that we are beginning with the *basmalah*, will come from a particular attribute of God, for example, *al-Hādī* for guidance, *al-ʿĀlim* for knowledge, *al-Razzāq* for sustenance, *al-Qādir* for strength, and so on.

Let me reflect on the specific attribute of God I am invoking in each particular action. In this regard, the supplication *Duʿā' al-Jawshan al-Kabīr* would be especially helpful as it mentions 1,000 Divine attributes.

With the *basmalah*, we begin our task in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, with the expectation of success through His Mercy. For this expectation to become a reality, we too need to manifest the attribute of mercy within our task. Let me reflect on how much mercy (which could be in the form of 'tough-love' in matters of discipline) I show to others in my actions.

The recitation of *basmalah* is a good start to any action but loses its true value when done without presence of mind. If we were to live the *basmalah*, it would have the following consequences:

1. The action now becomes worship (*ʿibādah*), done solely for God's pleasure (*ikhlāṣ*), in the way He wants, and is thus stamped with His 'logo'. Now it has acquired great value.

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[33] Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn Akhbār*, 1/260.
قالَ: سَأَلْتُ الرِّضا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلامُ) عَنْ «بِسْمِ اللهِ»، قالَ: مَعْنى قَوْلِ الْقائِلِ «بِسْمِ اللهِ» أَيْ أَسِمُ عَلى نَفْسي بِسِمَةٍ مِنْ سِماتِ اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَهِيَ «الْعُبُودِيَّةُ».

2. The action is commenced with hope of success in Godly terms, trusting in His favour and mercy; therefore, one does not have to worry about the outcome.

Let me reflect on whether these two consequences are found within my own actions.

VERSE 2

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

All [grateful] praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds. [2]

2.1 The *alif* and *lām* at the beginning of the word *al-ḥamd* denotes universal inclusion and exclusivity (*al-istighrāq*), and therefore means 'all praise', and not 'the praise'. It means that every praise returns to God. Whoever praises anyone at any moment and in any language is ultimately praising and thanking God, the Source of that perfection.[34]

2.2 *Al-Ḥamd* is a noun, and so is not associated with a time or a doer, as a verb would be. No command has been given to praise God, rather the phrase is presented as a fact and reality, that all praise only belongs to Him.

2.3 [*Al-Ḥamd*, (الْحَمْد, grateful praise)]: *Ḥamd* denotes praise with a sense of gratitude. (The difference between *ḥamd* and gratitude (*shukr*), is that *ḥamd* is praise by the tongue and heart, while *shukr* can be displayed by action also. Its distinction from *madḥ*, another word for praise, is that *ḥamd* is only used for one who displays a quality openly and with intent, while *madḥ* is used for one who may display a quality without intent, such as beauty.[35]

In summary, *ḥamd* includes *madḥ* (praise) and *shukr* (gratitude) to God. While *madḥ* or *shukr* to others is permissible, *ḥamd* is exclusively for God alone, which is why the verse says '*al-ḥamdu lillāh*'.

2.4 It has been highly recommended in many traditions to recite this verse constantly. Of course, this is with an understanding of its meaning and consequences. Some of these traditions are presented below:

A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: All praise and gratitude (*ḥamd*) is for Allah, who made *ḥamd* the key to His remembrance, the cause

[34] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 1/19.

[35] Rāghib, *al-Mufradāt*.

of increase from His grace, and the means to acknowledge His blessings and His Greatness.[36]

A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: Whoever recites this verse four times when he awakes in the morning has professed gratitude for his day, and whoever recites it four times in the evening has professed gratitude for his night.[37]

A tradition from Imam al-Ridha (a) says: The statement, '*al-ḥamdu lillāh*' is only a fulfilment of the gratitude that God has made obligatory on the creation; gratitude for the goodness that He has allowed His servant to attain.[38]

2.5 Indeed, *al-ḥamdu lillāh* is a comprehensive statement of gratitude. It is narrated that once, when Imam al-Sadiq (a) came out of the mosque, he saw that his mount was missing. He said, "If God returns it to me, I will certainly thank Him in the manner that He deserves." The animal was found a short time later, and the Imam (a) said, "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh!*" Someone said to him, "May I be sacrificed for you! Did you not say that you would thank God in the manner that He deserves?" The Imam (a) replied, "Did you not hear me say *al-ḥamdu lillāh*?"[39]

2.6 Indeed, this will remain the call of the believers even when they enter Paradise *inshā'Allah*. Q10:10 states:

وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

...The conclusion of their call shall be,
"All [grateful] praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds."

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[36] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 157.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الْحَمْدَ مِفْتَاحًا لِذِكْرِهِ، وَسَبَبًا لِلْمَزِيدِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ، وَدَلِيلًا عَلَى آلَائِهِ وَعَظَمَتِهِ.

[37] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/503.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – مَنْ قَالَ أَرْبَعَ مَرَّاتٍ إِذَا أَصْبَحَ «الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ» فَقَدْ أَدَّى شُكْرَ يَوْمِهِ، وَمَنْ قَالَهَا إِذَا أَمْسَى فَقَدْ أَدَّى شُكْرَ لَيْلَتِهِ.

[38] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 6/38.

عَنِ الرِّضَا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – أَنَّ قَوْلَهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: «الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ» إِنَّمَا هُوَ أَدَاءُ مَا أَوْجَبَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ مِنَ الشُّكْرِ وَشُكْرٌ لِمَا وَفَّقَ عَبْدَهُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ.

[39] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/97.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – خَرَجَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ وَقَدْ ضَاعَتْ دَابَّتُهُ، فَقَالَ: لَئِنْ رَدَّهَا اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ لَأَشْكُرَنَّ اللَّهَ حَقَّ شُكْرِهِ، قَالَ: فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ أُتِيَ بِهَا، فَقَالَ: «الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ»، فَقَالَ لَهُ قَائِلٌ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ أَلَيْسَ قُلْتَ لَأَشْكُرَنَّ اللَّهَ حَقَّ شُكْرِهِ؟ فَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): أَلَمْ تَسْمَعْنِي قُلْتُ «الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ».

2.7 *Al-ḥamdu lillāh* is followed by mention of four attributes of God: His Lordship, His general mercy, His special mercy, and His undeniable authority on the Day of Judgment, which indicates that on account of these Divine attributes, man has to express *ḥamd* to God.

2.8 [*Rabb* (رَبّ, Lord)]: This term is used for one who has authority and ownership of something, and also plays a role in its development and sustenance.[40]

2.9 It should be noted that on its own, the term *Rabb* is only used for God, the Almighty. When used for other than Him, it is always annexed to another noun or pronoun (*al-iḍāfah*), for example, *rabb al-dār* (owner of the house).[41]

2.10 God is *al-Rabb*, the true Sustainer. Unlike other sustainers (*arbāb*), He is neither limited in His power to sustain, nor in His wisdom to know what is required, nor in His love and care, nor in His ability to provide adequately and abundantly.

2.11 [*ʿĀlamīn* (عَالَمِين, worlds)]: It is the plural of *ʿālam*, which itself is pluralistic in meaning, referring to all sentient beings, and more generally, the whole world of creation.[42] This meaning is made clear by Prophet Musa's (a) debate with Firʿawn, which is described in Q26:23,24

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَمَا رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ قَالَ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا

Firʿawn asked, "What is the Lord of the worlds (ʿālamīn)*?"*
He [Musa] replied, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them...

2.12 The phrase, *Rabb al-ʿālamīn*, reminds man that he is but one small part of the great multitude of creatures that God sustains. However, while he is a single individual, what he has in common with everyone else is that they all have the same Lord. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he has been taught in this chapter to supplicate to God by using the plural 'we' even when praying on his own.

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[40] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, 1/20.

[41] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/96.

[42] Ibid.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse declares that since God is the essence of perfection and His actions are independent of any assistance, He alone is deserving of true praise as the Sustainer and all-Wise Cherisher of the worlds. If anything other than Him deserves praise, it is as a consequence of something that He has granted, so the praise ultimately returns to Him.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Al-ḥamdu lillāh should be on our lips at every moment. A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: When the Prophet (s) was pleased at an outcome, he would say, "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh* for this blessing," and when he was disappointed at an outcome, he would say, "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh* in every situation."[43]

Let me reflect whether I say *al-ḥamdu lillāh* in every situation, good or bad, following this *sunnah* of the Prophet (s).

We think of *al-ḥamdu lillāh* only as a statement of gratitude for blessings we have received, whereas it should be something on our mind in every situation.

Let me reflect when I say *al-ḥamdu lillāh*, do I really mean it and am I truly thanking God, or do I say it with some lingering dissatisfaction or complaint?

VERSE 3

الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾

The Beneficent, the Merciful. [3]

3.1 The repetition of the two attributes *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* in this verse is for emphasis, and also to give a reason for the praise and gratefulness expressed in the previous verse, *'Al-ḥamdu lillāh'*.[44]

3.2 It is a reminder for man to model his life on the attribute of mercy. A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Model yourself on the

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[43] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/97.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – كَانَ رَسُولُ اللهِ إِذَا وَرَدَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرٌ يَسُرُّهُ قَالَ: «الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ عَلَى هٰذِهِ النِّعْمَةِ»، وَإِذَا وَرَدَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرٌ يَغُمُّهُ قَالَ: «الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ».

[44] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/97.

morals (*akhlāq*) of God. Indeed, most people shall enter Paradise due their God-wariness (*taqwā*) and good morals (*ḥusn al-khulq*).[45]

3.3 This verse is also a prelude to the next verse, which switches from God's attribute of beauty (*jamāl*) to His attribute of majesty (*jalāl*), reassuring the believers that the justice of God is preceded by His mercy. Imam al-Sajjad (a) quotes the Prophet (s) in one of his supplications: "O He whose mercy precedes His wrath."[46]

3.4 However, the next verse reminds us about the accountability of actions that is a part of God's justice. The attitude of hope and fear must go hand in hand, and encouragement and warning are both required to keep man on the straight path. God's Messengers (a) were always sent as both bearers of glad tidings as well as warners. For example, Q6:48 states:

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنْذِرِينَ

And We do not send the messengers except as bringers of good tidings [for the righteous]and warners [for the sinners]...

3.5 In a supplication attributed to Imam al-Mahdi (af), he states: "I have conviction that You are the most Merciful of the merciful in situations of pardon and mercy, and the strictest of punishers in situations that deserve chastisement and retribution."[47]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse, which is recited constantly in every prayer, reminds man that God's mercy encompasses him at all times. Indeed, God has created mankind to experience His mercy. Q11:119 states:

إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَٰلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ

Except those whom your Lord has given mercy [through guidance], and for that did He create them...

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[45] *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī*, p. 249.
عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – تَخَلَّقُوا بِأَخْلَاقِ اللهِ، إِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ بِتَقْوَى اللهِ وَحُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ.

[46] *Du'ā' al-Jawshan al-Kabīr.*
يَا مَنْ سَبَقَتْ رَحْمَتُهُ غَضَبَهُ.

[47] *Du'ā' al-Iftitāḥ.*
وَأَيْقَنْتُ أَنَّكَ أَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ الْعَفْوِ وَالرَّحْمَةِ وَأَشَدُّ الْمُعَاقِبِينَ فِي مَوْضِعِ النَّكَالِ وَالنَّقِمَةِ.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

God shows us mercy even when we are not deserving of it. Let me reflect on whether I have also adopted this quality of showing mercy to someone who is not deserving, or when I have the upper hand.

In *Du'ā' al-Jawshan al-Kabīr* we acknowledge that God's mercy precedes His wrath. Let me learn from this, and resolve to act with mercy whenever I am overcome by anger.

Do I observe the balance between hope and fear; hope of His mercy at the time of seeking forgiveness, and fear of His wrath before committing a sin?

VERSE 4

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾

Master of the Day of Judgment.

4.1 [*Mālik* (مَالِك, Master)]. The Mastership of God on that Day will be an undeniable reality, accompanied by absolute ownership, control and dominion. Real ownership is when the thing owned can have no independent existence from the owner. For example, we are the owners and masters of our limbs and faculties, but they only exist due to our existence, and not independently of us.[48]

4.2 Of course, God is *Mālik* in this world as well as the next. However, in this world, people are often oblivious to the true reality of things, and create various authorities and masters for themselves. But on that Day, the veils of confusion are lifted from before everyone's eyes. Q50:22 states:

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هٰذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

[It will be said:] You were certainly heedless of this [while in the world], and now We have removed from you your veil, so on this Day, your sight is piercing.

And because of their clear insight no-one will be able to deny His Majesty. Q40:16 states:

لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلّٰهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ

[48] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 1/21.

...To Whom belongs the kingdom this Day?
To Allah, the One, the Vanquisher!

4.3 The absolute authority of God and the consequences of His judgment will be clear on that Day when everyone will be helpless before God, waiting for His decision about their fate. Q82:17-19 state in this regard:

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٧﴾ ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٨﴾
يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ

And what will make you realize what the [reality of the] Day of Judgment is? Again, what will make you realize what the [unimaginable] Day of Judgment is? It is the Day when no person will have the power to do anything for another; and the command on that Day will be [wholly] with God.

Similarly, a tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: As for His words, '*Master of the Day of Judgment*', He will have control over the forelock of every creature on the Day of Judgment. He will cause everyone who was defiant and oppressive in the world to enter into hellfire, and they will not be able to escape the punishment of God. As for those who were obedient, steadfast, and careful about obeying God, He shall enter them into Paradise out of His mercy.[49]

4.4 Reciting '*Malik* (مَلِك, Sovereign, Lord)' instead of '*Mālik* (مَالِك, Master, Owner)' in the prayers is allowed by the jurists, because it is one of the accepted seven recitation styles (*qirā'āt al-sab'a*) of the Qur'an. For example, a *fatwā* states: [In one's *salat*] It is permissible to recite either '*Māliki yawm al-dīn* (مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّين)' or '*Maliki yawm al-dīn* (مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّين)'.[50] Although the two words have different meanings, they both are attributes of Allah, who is both the Sovereign Lord and the Master of creation.

4.5 [*Al-Dīn* (الدِّين, religion)] literally means recompense, and because recompense depends on the obedience and disobedience of God's commandments, it has come to mean the religion that God has sent

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[49] Daylamī, *Irshād al-Qulūb*, 2/365.
عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – وَأَمَّا قَوْلُهُ:" مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ «فَإِنَّهُ يَمْلِكُ نَوَاصِيَ الْخَلْقِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَكُلُّ مَنْ كَانَ شَاكًّا أَوْ جَبَّارًا أَدْخَلَهُ النَّارَ، وَلَا يَمْتَنِعُ مِنْ عَذَابِ اللهِ شَاكٌّ وَلَا جَبَّارٌ، وَكُلُّ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الدُّنْيَا طَائِعًا مُحِبًّا مُحَافِظًا إِيَّاهُ أَدْخَلَهُ الْجَنَّةَ بِرَحْمَتِهِ.

[50] Sistānī, *Minhāj*, vol.1, *fatwā* 613.

down. Since the final consequence of actions will only be seen on the Day of Judgment, '*dīn*', and '*yawm al-dīn*' are used as metaphors for the Final Day, just as stated in Q82:9

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالدِّينِ

No [the delay in punishment deludes you],
but [in reality] you belie the [Day of] Judgment!

4.6 [*Yawm al-dīn* (يَوْم الدِّين, Day of Judgment)] therefore refers to the Day of reckoning, judgment, and recompense. This belief in *yawm al-dīn* is a foundational tenet of Islam. This Day is a recurring theme in the Qur'an and has been described in different ways depending on the message intended in the verse. It has been called *yawm al-qiyāmah* (Day of Resurrection, Q2:85), *yawm al-ḥisāb* (Day of Accounting, Q38:16), *yawm al-taghābun* (Day of Dispossession, Q64:9), *yawm al-faṣl* (Day of Separation, Q37:21), *yawm al-ākhir* (the Last Day, Q2:8), *yawm al-jam'* (Day of Assembly, Q42:7), *yawn al-maw'ūd* (the Promised Day, Q85:2), *yawm al-ba'th* (Day of Rising, Q30:56), *yawm al-ḥasrah* (Day of Regret, Q19:39), *yawm al-ḥaqq* (Day of Truth, Q78:39), *yawm al-talāq* (Day of Meeting, Q40:15), *yawm al-wa'īd* (Day of Warning, Q50:20), *yawm al-khulūd* (Day of Eternal Life, Q50:34), *yawm al-fatḥ* (Day of Victory, Q32:29), *yawm al-tanād* (Day of Calling, Q40:32), and by several other names such as, *al-wāqi'ah* (the Inevitable Event, Q56:1), *al-ḥāqqah* (the Reality, Q69:1), *al-sā'ah* (the Hour, Q6:31), and *al-faza'a al-akbar* (the Great Terror, Q21:103). God continually reminds man of the huge significance of that Day. Q2:281 states:

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

And beware a Day when you will be returned to God.
Then, every soul shall be paid what it has earned,
and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.

4.7 Some exegetes believe that it is called '*yawm al-dīn*' because the only thing of value on that Day will be belief and action on the religion (*dīn*) that God had sent down through His Prophets (a).[51]

[51] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/100.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse reminds the believer that God will be the undisputed Master and Arbiter of every affair on the Day of Judgment. Belief and conviction in the Final Day is a tenet of faith, serving as a powerful deterrent from sinful conduct for every Muslim.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on whether I am acutely aware that Allah is my Master in this world or whether I will wait for the next world to acknowledge the fact.

And if I accept His Mastership here, how is it manifested in my belief and conduct?

VERSE 5

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

You [alone] do we worship, and You [alone] do we ask for help.

5.1 In this verse, the address changes from the third person (He) to the second person (You).

After introducing Himself and infusing love, recognition, and servitude in the heart of His servant, God now instructs him to address his Lord directly. He teaches him that there is no barrier between the Creator and a lowly servant. This invitation is indeed a great honour.

In one of his supplications Imam al-Sajjad (a) confesses: "My Lord! Were it not incumbent on me to obey Your command, I would declare You too exalted for me to mention You..."[52]

5.2 The use of *iyyāka* (إِيَّاكَ, You) before the verbs, [*na'budu* (نَعْبُدُ, we worship)] and [*nasta'īn* (نَسْتَعِينُ, we ask for help)] is for exclusivity (*inḥiṣār*), and gives the meaning of 'You alone, and no other'.

5.3 The servant, after having recognized Whom he is supplicating to, addresses his Lord directly, first pledging his worship to Him, and

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[52] Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān, Munājāt al-dhākirīn* (The whispered prayer of the rememberers).

إِلٰهِي لَوْلَا الْوَاجِبُ مِنْ قَبُولِ أَمْرِكَ لَنَزَّهْتُكَ مِنْ ذِكْرِي إِيَّاكَ.

only then, daring to ask for His support. This support starts from the assistance of God that he will need in keeping his pledge of worshipping Him alone, and then extends to every other need.

5.4 By seeking support from God alone, the supplicant has accepted that he is worshipping Him alone as well.[53]

5.5 Declaring one's submission and utter dependence on God is a great lesson in humility and in breaking the ego, because pride and arrogance is despised by God. Q40:60 states:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ

... Indeed, those who are too proud for My worship shall soon enter Hell, abased.

5.6 Interestingly, the pronouns for this supplication are mentioned in the plural. This shows the importance of communal progress side by side with individual progress. In fact, the collective wellbeing and progress of a society is the cornerstone of the *sharī'ah*, with great rewards mentioned for all acts that bring the *ummah* closer to one another, such as praying in daily congregation, weekly *Jumu'ah* prayer, the annual Haj, eating together, marriage, and so on. Conversely, there is great sin in actions that would tear the fabric of society, such as cutting off contact with near relatives, backbiting, adultery, and so on.

The use of the collective pronoun, 'we', also creates humility in the supplicant, effacing the tendency of self-importance, and reminding him that he is but one of God's countless creatures.

5.7 Additionally, the supplicant acknowledges that on his own, he may not be deserving of God's grace, but he includes himself with the rest of God's servants so as to worship alongside those who are closer to God than him. And this collective supplication is what God instructs as well, as stated in Q24:31:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

... And turn to God [in repentance] together, O believers, so that you may be successful.

[53] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/102.

5.8 Sincere worship (*'ibādah*) and seeking divine assistance (*isti'ānah*) are manifestations of the praise and gratitude (*ḥamd*) mentioned in the second verse, and in fact are consequences of it.

5.9 A tradition states that when he was asked about this verse, Imam al-Ridha (a) said: *Iyyāka na'budu* is a declaration of love and the desire to get close to God, exalted be His mention, and to dedicate every act solely to Him and no other. *Iyyāka nasta'īn* is asking Him for greater opportunity to do good (*tawfīq*), to worship Him, and seeking the continuation of the blessings God has bestowed upon him, and for His support.[54]

5.10 The previous verses alluded to *tawḥīd al-dhāt* (unicity in God's Essence), by saying that God Alone deserves all praise, and *tawḥīd al-ṣifāt* (unicity in God's attributes, by mention that God is *al-Rabb*, *al-Raḥmān*, *al-Raḥīm*, and *al-Mālik*). In this verse, there is mention of *tawḥīd al-'ibādah* and *tawḥīd al-af'āl*.

Tawḥīd al-'ibādah means not to consider anything or anyone worthy of worship except God, and to bow our heads in submission to Him alone.

Tawḥīd al-af'āl means to believe His to be the only influence in the whole of existence, and the Moving Cause of every cause and effect around us.

The overall result of this understanding is that man will seek only God, and only from God, devotedly relying on His power, guidance, wisdom, and support.

5.11 This verse clearly indicates that there is neither absolute compulsion (*jabr*) on mankind nor complete delegation (*tafwīḍ*) to them. When we say, '*You [alone] do we worship*', we do this out of our free will, and when we say, '*and You [alone] do we ask for help*', we acknowledge our neediness of Him.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse is a pledge and an admission. A pledge to worship God and no other, and an admission that the servant needs assistance from God only, and no one else.

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[54] Ṣadūq, *al-Faqīh*, 1/310.

عَنِ الرِّضَا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ» رَغْبَةٌ وَتَقَرُّبٌ إِلَى اللهِ تَعَالَى ذِكْرُهُ وَإِخْلَاصٌ لَهُ بِالْعَمَلِ دُونَ غَيْرِهِ، وَ«إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ» اسْتِزَادَةٌ مِنْ تَوْفِيقِهِ وَعِبَادَتِهِ وَاسْتِدَامَةٌ لِمَا أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَنَصْرَهُ.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Worship in practice is submission to God; verbally, in actions and in the heart. Let me reflect on how strong my pledge to God is when I promise to worship Him alone.

Showing neediness to others is humiliating, but showing neediness to God is honourable. Even when people seek assistance from each other, they should realize that the assistance is only through the permission of God.

Let me reflect on whether I realize that when I have a chance to help someone, it is an opportunity and not a burden. And when I reject their request, I lose an opportunity to become God's agent and get closer to Him.

VERSE 6

اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

Guide us on the straight (correct) path.

6.1 Immediately after saying that he only seeks the help of God, the supplicant is instructed to ask for the greatest gift: the gift of correct guidance.

6.2 [*Ihdinā* (اِهْدِنَا, guide us)] can have several meanings:

i) Show us the right path. This is a plea for correct guidance even as Muslims. The supplicant beseeches God to always be guided along the correct path, so as to attain His pleasure and proximity. Q10:25 states in this regard:

وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَىٰ دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

And God invites to the abode of peace and guides whom He wills to a straight path.

ii) Keep us on the right path (which will lead to God-wariness (*taqwā*) in this world). What we mean to say here is that although we are presently on the right way, we fear that we will deviate from it unless we have God's constant help. This help is mentioned in Q47:17

وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَآتَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ

As for those who follow guidance, He increases them in guidance, and grants them their [true] God-wariness.

iii) Reward us for our faith by constantly guiding us. Here what is meant is: guide us so that we reach our potential, perfection, and thereby Paradise. This meaning is mentioned in Q10:9

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُم بِإِيمَانِهِمْ
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ

Indeed, those who believe and perform righteous acts,
their Lord will guide them because of their faith;
beneath them rivers will flow in the gardens of bliss.

Indeed, knowledge can be increased by learning, but that does not guarantee guidance. True guidance can only come from God, and this is acknowledged by the believers as they enter Paradise, as stated in in Q7:43

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ

...And they shall say: Praise [and thanks] be to God,
Who guided us to this. And we would never have been guided
[aright] if God had not [constantly] guided us...

6.3 [*Ṣirāṭ* (صِرَاط, path)]: *Ṣirāṭ* means a clear path, which is expansive and has no deviations,[55] and [*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (الصِرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيم, the straight path)] refers to the specific path of the worship of God and obedience of His injunctions. This is evidenced by Q6:161, which states:

قُلْ إِنَّنِي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا

Say, 'Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path
(ṣirāṭin mustaqīm), *an upright religion...*

6.4 The Qur'an has given further information about the straight path in Q6:151-153 by listing several commands: Do not join anything in worship with Him, treat your parents well, do not kill your children because of poverty, do not approach lewd things, whether open or hidden, do not kill an innocent person, do not usurp the wealth of the orphan, give full measure and weight, keep your word, and fulfil the covenant you made with God.

[55] Rāghib, *al-Mufradāt*.

Thereafter, God states:

وَأَنَّ هَٰذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّاكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Indeed, this [what has been mentioned in these verses] is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, lest they lead you away from His way. This He has instructed you so that you may become God-wary.

6.5 The whole of creation is on an existential and compulsory journey back towards God, and man is no exception to this return. This journey can take several pathways, but there is one special path amongst them, *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Since man has free will, he can select whatever path he wants to return to His Lord. In addition to free will however, man has also been endowed with the desire to achieve perfection. The supplication, '*Guide us on the straight path,*' is in fact a prayer to be guided on the path that will lead him to perfection.[56]

6.6 In one tradition, Imam al-Sadiq (a) has explained the meaning of this verse as follows: Guide us towards the straight path. Guide us to follow the path that leads to Your love, and brings us to Your way. [The path that] prevents us from following our base desires thereby harming ourselves, and our personal opinions thereby being ruined.[57]

6.7 Accordingly, the straight path has been interpreted in some traditions as the Qur'an, and in others as the path shown by the Ahl al-Bayt (a). This is because only these two can lead man to eternal felicity, as they contain no error and deviation. They are the 'two weighty things (*thaqalayn*)' mentioned in many traditions. According to a widely transmitted (*mutawātir*) report accepted by all Muslims, the Prophet (s) counselled the *ummah*: I am leaving behind two things. If you hold fast on to them you will never go astray: the Book (Qur'an) of God, the Almighty, and my household (Ahl al-Bayt), my progeny.[58]

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[56] Muṭahharī, (*Āshnāyī bā Qur'an*), *Āthār*, 26/10.

[57] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 27/49.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – فِي قَوْلِهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: «اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ» قَالَ: يَقُولُ أَرْشِدْنَا إِلَى الصِّرَاطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ، أَرْشِدْنَا لِلُزُومِ الطَّرِيقِ الْمُؤَدِّي إِلَى مَحَبَّتِكَ، وَالْمُبَلِّغِ إِلَى دِينِكَ، وَالْمَانِعِ مِنْ أَنْ نَتَّبِعَ أَهْوَاءَنَا، فَنَعْطَبَ أَوْ نَأْخُذَ بِآرَائِنَا فَنَهْلِكَ.

[58] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/294. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4/1883, similar wording.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) – إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ، إِنْ أَخَذْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا، كِتَابَ اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَأَهْلَ بَيْتِي عِتْرَتِي.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse is a supplication for the most important blessing of God, the gift of correct guidance. Guidance to a straight path that leads to His proximity and pleasure. In short, this path of guidance, *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, is the path of absolute servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*) to God, just as Q36:61 states:

وَأَنِ ٱعْبُدُونِي هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ

And that you should worship [only] Me. This is the straight path.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on:

- What is my evidence of being on the right path?
- What is keeping me on the right path and what might move me away from it?
- Am I constantly working on my journey towards my potential, perfection, and Paradise?

VERSE 7

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours. Not [the path] of those upon whom Your wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray. [7]

7.1 This verse gives further details of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, by pointing out examples of those who stayed on it and those who deviated from it. It is a showcase of the concept of *tawallā* (wanting to be with those who have earned God's favour) and *tabarrā* (disassociating from those who have earned God's displeasure and strayed).

7.2 [*An'amta* (أَنْعَمْتَ, you have bestowed favours)]. Derived from *n'am*, it means granting favours (*in'ām*) that give another ease, comfort, and happiness. It is used especially for sentient beings, who can appreciate these favours and use them wisely or unwisely.[59] God has granted innumerable blessings to all human beings, as stated in Q16:18:

[59] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 1/28.

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا

And if you should count the favours of God,
you could not enumerate them...

7.3 However, the blessing and favour mentioned in the final verse of Surat al-Fātiḥah is not referring to the worldly blessings that all human beings receive, such as wealth, health, family, opportunities, etc. It is something that was granted to the close servants of God, and denied to those who angered God and those who went astray.

7.4 Imam al-Sajjad (a) states in one of his supplications: And among Your greatest favours to us is the continual flow of Your remembrance on our tongues, and Your permission to us to supplicate to You, exalt You, and glorify You![60]

7.5 In the previous verse, the supplicant is taught to ask for guidance on the straight path, and this verse gives further details of that path. It is the path of those on whom God has bestowed favours, foremost of which is the favour of guidance. Q4:69 tells us who these individuals are:

وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِمْ
مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ

And whoever obeys God and the Messenger, those will be with the ones upon whom God has bestowed favours, from the Prophets, the veracious, the martyrs, and the righteous...

7.6 About the use of the past tense, a tradition states that Imam al-Ridha (a) said: '*The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours*'... is a reference to God's favours to His close servants in the past, intending to evoke a desire in the servant to receive similar favours.[61]

7.7 [*Maghḍūb*, (مَغْضُوبِ, those who have incurred [God's] wrath)]. The word is derived from *ghaḍaba*, meaning to become angry. In human beings, anger is an emotional reaction that may initiate a response. However, when matters such as love, gratitude, anger and so on are attributed

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[60] Qummī, *Mafātīh al-Jinān, Munājāt al-dhākirīn* (The whispered prayer of the rememberers).
وَمِنْ أَعْظَمِ النِّعَمِ عَلَيْنَا جَرَيَانُ ذِكْرِكَ عَلَى أَلْسِنَتِنَا وَإِذْنُكَ لَنَا بِدُعَائِكَ وَتَسْرِيحِكَ وَتَسْبِيحِكَ.

[61] Ṣadūq, *'Uyūn Akhbār*, 2/107.
عَنِ الرِّضَا (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – «صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ» تَوْكِيدٌ فِي السُّؤَالِ وَالرَّغْبَةِ وَذِكْرٌ لِمَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ نِعَمِهِ عَلَى أَوْلِيَائِهِ وَرَغْبَةٌ فِي مِثْلِ تِلْكَ النِّعَمِ.

to God, it does not mean a change in state at all, because God is above all bodily limitations and reactions; rather, it refers to Divine recompense and retribution.

7.8 [*Ḍāllīn* (ضَالِّين, those who have gone astray)]. The word is derived from *ḍalla*, meaning to stray and to lack guidance. In this verse, it refers to those who strayed from *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* into deviant paths.

7.9 The insertion of the second negative (*lā*) between '*maghḍūbi 'alayhim*' and '*ḍāllīn*' is to emphasize that these groups are distinct from one another.

7.10 [*Maghḍūbi 'alayhim* (مَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ, those upon whom [Your wrath] is brought down)] and [*Ḍāllīn* (ضَالِّينَ, those who go astray)]: There are several possibilities about whom these two terms refer to:

i) *Maghḍūbi 'alayhim* refers to the waverers and hypocrites, and *al-ḍāllīn* refers to those who have gone astray in general, without specifying any particular community or group.[62]

ii) *Maghḍūbi 'alayhim* refers to those amongst the Jews who earned God's wrath, and *al-ḍāllīn* refers to those amongst the Christians who had gone astray and distorted the teachings of their Prophets (a).[63] The next two chapters speaks about these two groups in sequence with Surat al-Baqarah (2) addressing the conduct of the Jews and Surat Āl-'Imrān (3) the conduct of the Christians.

A report states that one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: I asked the Imam (a), "Should I say '*Āmīn* (amen)' after the Imam of prayer says '*Not [the path] of those upon whom Your wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray*'?" The Imam (a) replied, "That refers to the Jews and the Christians", and he did not reply to my question.[64] (This silence of Imam (a) was probably due to dissimulation (*taqiyyah*), and indicates his disapproval of the practice).[65]

iii) *Maghḍūbi 'alayhim* refers to those who went astray and misguided others as well, and *al-ḍāllīn* refers to those who went astray alone.[66]

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[62] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 1/55.

[63] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 1/108.

[64] 'Āmilī, *Wasā'il*, 6/67.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) – عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ وَهْبٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) أَقُولُ: «آمِينَ» إِذَا قَالَ الْإِمَامُ: «غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ»، قَالَ: «هُمُ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى»، وَلَمْ يُجِبْنِي هَذَا.

[65] Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, 3/526.

[66] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 1/55.

Q5:77 states:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا أَهْوَاءَ قَوْمٍ قَدْ ضَلُّوا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَضَلُّوا عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ

Say: O People of the Scripture! Do not exceed the bounds of your religion, trespassing beyond the truth, and do not follow the inclinations of a people who had 1) gone astray before and misled many, and 2) strayed from the right way.

7.11 The verse contrasts the paths chosen by three groups of people in their worship of God.[67]

i) The first group (*an'amta 'alayhim*) walks on a path of absolute servitude to God, enveloped in His special mercy, receiving His guidance and blessings continually, and constantly ascending in proximity towards Him. This is the group of the close servants (*awliyā'*) of God. What the believer seeks in the previous verse is guidance on this path.

ii) The second group of people (*maghḍūbi 'alayhim*) are those who worship something other than God, for example, wealth or their own desires. With the passage of time, their beliefs and actions move them further and further way from the right path. They lose sight of their human potential and give in to a pleasure-seeking existence. Instead of continually receiving God's favours like the first group, they become the focus of God's anger, and thereby lose the purpose for which they were brought to this world. Q20:81 states:

وَمَنْ يَحْلِلْ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدْ هَوَىٰ

... And he upon whom My anger descends has indeed fallen.

iii) The third group (*ḍāllīn*) is of people who waver between the two paths; sometimes they turn to God, and at other times they give in to their personal desires. The net result is that their life has little ultimate worth, and they go astray from the path that would have led them to achieve their true potential, and thereby perfection and Paradise. The verse calls this group *al-ḍāllīn*, and in Q4:143, God describes them as:

[67] Summarizing from: Muṭahharī, *(Āshnāyī bā Qur'an), Āthār*, 26/112-13.

مُذَبْذَبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ لَا إِلَىٰ هَٰؤُلَاءِ وَلَا إِلَىٰ هَٰؤُلَاءِ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ سَبِيلًا

They [the hypocrites] waver between this [and that], belonging neither to these [the believers] nor to those [the disbelievers]. And whoever God leaves astray, you [O Muhammad] will never find for him a way.

7.12 Out of the three groups described in this verse, the only one for whom God's direct action is mentioned is the first one, those that He blessed (*an'amta 'alayhim*). That is because whatever comes from God is only goodness and mercy. It is only man's defiant actions that earns Divine wrath and the penalty of misguidance.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, what is asked for in the last two verses is, "O God! Keep us on the correct path, the path of Your closest servants who constantly received Your blessings, not the path of those who did not worship You and thereby earned Your anger, or the path of those who wavered between this and that, and went astray thereby."

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on which of these three groups I fit into best, given my own my beliefs and actions.

In summary it can be said that *maghḍūbi 'alayhim* are those who had knowledge and misused it, and *al-ḍāllīn* and are those who had knowledge, but did not commit to it.

We do not want to belong to either group, so let me reflect on the knowledge that I have and how it is shown in my actions.

SURAT AL-KĀFIRŪN
THE DISBELIEVERS (109)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

سُورَةُ الْكَافِرُونَ

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾
وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say, "O Disbelievers! [1] *I will never worship what you worship.* [2] *Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship.* [3] *Nor will I ever be a worshipper of what you worshipped.* [4] *Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship.* [5] *To you is your religion, and to me is my religion!"* [6]

INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Kāfirūn (109) was the 18th chapter to be revealed, between Surat al-Mā'ūn and al-Fīl.[68] It has six verses and is a Makkan chapter, revealed in the early years of the Prophet's (s) mission.[69] It is named after the unbelievers (*Kāfirūn*) who approached the Prophet (s) with a proposal to compromise by adopting each-others' faith in turn.

The Quraysh were reluctant to give up their idols because their whole political and economic dominance rested on allowing people of every nation to worship their own idol at the Ka'bah. For this reason, they attempted to assimilate the message of the Prophet (s) and were willing to give room to 'his God' as well.

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[68] Ma'rifat, *'Ulūm-i Qur'ānī*, p. 90.

[69] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 10/840.

OCCASION OF REVELATION

A group of [the chiefs of] the Quraysh including ʿUtbah b. Rabiʿah, Umayyah b. Khalaf, al-Walid b. al-Mughīrah [the father of Khalid b. al-Walid], and al-ʿĀṣ b. Saʿīd [the father of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ] came to the Messenger (s) and said, "Come, let us worship what you worship, and you worship what we worship, and let us collaborate in the affair. If the path we follow is the true one, then you will receive your benefit, and if your path is the true one, we too will receive our benefit from it. At this time, God the Almighty revealed: *Say, 'O Disbelievers! I will never worship what you worship. Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship...'* to the end of the chapter.[70]

A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: The reason for the revelation of these verses and the repetition of the phrases is because the Quraysh proposed to God's Messenger (s) that, "Worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for a year. Then you worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for a year. So God replied to them in the same manner that they had spoken. As for their proposal that their gods should be worshipped for one year, the answer was, '*Say: O Disbelievers! I will never worship what you worship.*' As for their pledge to worship God for one year, the answer was, '*Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship.*' And in reply to their proposal that their gods should be worshipped the following year, the answer was, '*Nor will I ever be a worshipper of what you worshipped.*' And in reply to their pledge to worship God the following year, the answer was, '*Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship. To you is your religion, and to me is my religion!*'[71]

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[70] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 7/33.

إِنَّ نَفَرًا مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ اعْتَرَضُوا الرَّسُولَ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) مِنْهُمْ: عُتْبَةُ بْنُ رَبِيعَةَ، وَأُمَيَّةُ بْنُ خَلَفٍ، وَالْوَلِيدُ بْنُ الْمُغِيرَةِ، وَالْعَاصُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، فَقَالُوا: يَا مُحَمَّدُ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ)، هَلُمَّ فَلْنَعْبُدْ مَا تَعْبُدُ، وَتَعْبُدْ مَا نَعْبُدُ، فَنَشْتَرِكَ نَحْنُ وَأَنْتَ فِي الْأَمْرِ، فَإِنْ يَكُنِ الَّذِي نَحْنُ عَلَيْهِ الْحَقَّ فَقَدْ أَخَذْتَ بِحَظِّكَ مِنْهُ، وَإِنْ يَكُنِ الَّذِي أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِ الْحَقَّ فَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا بِحَظِّنَا مِنْهُ، فَأَنْزَلَ اللهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى: «قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ» إِلَى آخِرِ السُّورَةِ.

[71] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 9/253.

فَسَأَلَ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) عَنْ ذَلِكَ، فَقَالَ: كَانَ سَبَبُ نُزُولِهَا وَتَكْرَارِهَا أَنَّ قُرَيْشًا قَالَتْ لِرَسُولِ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَنَا سَنَةً، وَنَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ سَنَةً، وَتَعْبُدُ إِلَهَنَا سَنَةً، وَنَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ سَنَةً، فَأَجَابَهُمُ اللهُ بِمِثْلِ مَا قَالُوا، فَقَالَ فِيمَا قَالُوا «تَعْبُدُ إِلَهَنَا سَنَةً» -«قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ»، وَفِيمَا قَالُوا «وَنَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ سَنَةً» - «وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ»، وَفِيمَا قَالُوا «تَعْبُدُ إِلَهَنَا سَنَةً» - «وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدْتُمْ»، وَفِيمَا قَالُوا «وَنَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ سَنَةً» - «وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ».

LINK TO PREVIOUS CHAPTER

In the previous chapter, Surat al-Kawthar, there is a reference to the insults of the disbelievers when they taunted the Prophet (s) that he had no surviving children. God replied to them that He would give him abundance, and his enemies would remain without lineage (*abtar*). The leaders of the disbelievers were still of the opinion that if they could somehow assimilate Islam into their practice, and offer the Prophet (s) some compromise, he would be forced to consider their proposal because he had no sons to continue his legacy. This chapter instructs the Prophet (s) to emphatically reject the proposal of the Quraysh sending a clear message to them that he would never compromise on any aspect of his mission.

Furthermore, in Surat al-Kawthar, their insults to the Prophet (s) were based on something that he had no control over, while in this chapter God labelled them as disbelievers, a trait that was based on their own actions.

MERITS OF RECITATION

- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: God will grant the one who recites this surah the reward of reciting one-quarter of the Qur'an and will distance him from the harassment of Shaytan. [Furthermore,] God will give him salvation from the terrors of the Day of Judgment.

  Whoever recites it before going to sleep will not be harmed while he sleeps. So, teach your children to recite it when they go to sleep.

  God shall accept the supplication of the one who recites it ten times at daybreak, and then asks for his wishes for this world and the Hereafter, as long as there is no sin associated with what he asks for.[72]
- A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: Whenever the Prophet (s) led us in prayer on a journey, he would [always] recite Surat al-Kāfirūn after Surat al-Ḥamd in the first unit and Surat al-Ikhlāṣ after Surat al-

[72] Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, 5/780.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): مَنْ قَرَأَ هٰذِهِ السُّورَةَ أَعْطَاهُ اللهُ تَعَالَى مِنَ الْأَجْرِ كَأَنَّمَا قَرَأَ رُبُعَ الْقُرْآنِ، وَتَبَاعَدَتْ عَنْهُ مُؤْذِيَةُ الشَّيْطَانِ، وَنَجَّاهُ اللهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ فَزَعِ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَمَنْ قَرَأَهَا عِنْدَ مَنَامِهِ، لَمْ يَتَعَرَّضْ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي مَنَامِهِ، فَعَلِّمُوهَا صِبْيَانَكُمْ عِنْدَ النَّوْمِ. وَمَنْ قَرَأَهَا عِنْدَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ عَشْرَ مَرَّاتٍ، وَدَعَا بِمَا أَرَادَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، اسْتَجَابَ اللهُ لَهُ، مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ مَعْصِيَةً بِفِعْلِهَا.

Ḥamd in the second unit. Then he would say, "I have recited for you one-third and one-fourth of the Qur'an."[73]

- A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: My father (a) would say that Surat al-Kāfirūn is equal to one-fourth of the Qur'an [in merit]. And when he finished reciting it, he would say, "I worship Allah alone, I worship Allah alone."[74]
- A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: God will preserve from polytheism (*shirk*) the one who recites Surat al-Kāfirūn and Surat al-Tawḥīd when he goes to bed.[75]

EXEGESIS

VERSE 1

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾

Say, "O Disbelievers! [1]

1.1 [*Qul* (قُلْ, say)] The verse begins with the command '*qul*', indicating a decisive response and declaration by God, and not the Prophet (s), to a question or matter raised. In this case, the Prophet (s) is commanded to reject the contentious suggestion by the unbelievers of Quraysh.

1.2 Even in their proposal they said that they would worship the God of the Prophet (s) every alternate year, not taking Him for their own Lord. This is a similar thing to the alternate sharing of land, farms, and goods![76]

1.3 Addressing them as 'disbelievers' is not meant to censure them, insult them, or express anger; it is merely an expression that their position was in no way compatible with Islam, and no compromise

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[73] Ṣadūq, *'Uyūn Akhbār*, 2/37.
عَنْ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): كَانَ رَسُولُ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) إِذَا صَلَّى بِنَا صَلَاةَ الشَّفْرِ قَرَأَ فِي الْأُولَى الْحَمْدَ وَ«قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ»، وَفِي الْأُخْرَى الْحَمْدَ وَ«قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ»، ثُمَّ قَالَ: قَرَأْتُ لَكُمْ ثُلُثَ الْقُرْآنِ وَرُبُعَهُ.

[74] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 10/839.
عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): كَانَ أَبِي يَقُولُ: «قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ» رُبُعُ الْقُرْآنِ، وَكَانَ إِذَا فَرَغَ مِنْهَا قَالَ: أَعْبُدُ اللهَ وَحْدَهُ، أَعْبُدُ اللهَ وَحْدَهُ.

[75] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/626.
عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ قَرَأَ إِذَا أَوَى إِلَى فِرَاشِهِ «قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ» وَ«قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ» كَتَبَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَهُ بَرَاءَةً مِنَ الشِّرْكِ.

[76] Javādī-Āmolī, *Tasnīm*. (Transcript: http://javadi.esra.ir/-/22-10-9931-تفسیر-سوره-کافرون)

would ever be possible. It was a stark statement of truth, after which there was nothing but error, as Q10:32 states:

فَمَاذَا بَعْدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ

And what can be beyond the truth [of monotheism]
except the error [of polytheism]?

1.4 [*Al-Kāfirūn* (الْكَافِرُونَ, disbelievers)]. The term is used here as a noun, not limited to a time or place, indicating that this group of people were not just displaying their lack of belief, rather God considered them absolute disbelievers. Essentially, it means that the choice was between being a believer or a disbeliever, with no possibility of compromise.

1.5 The Qur'an uses the word *kufr* (كُفْر, disbelief) and its cognates in a wide range of meanings over 500 times. The original meaning of *kafara* is to cover something.[77] In general, the term *kufr* can be considered under three headings:

i) *Kufr* that is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. For example, in Q57:20, the farmer who sows seeds by covering them under the ground is called '*kāfir*':

كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا

...Like the vegetation after rain, the growth of which pleases the farmer, but then it dries, and you see it turn yellow...

ii) *Kufr* that is praiseworthy. This refers to covering in the sense of denouncing something which should be rejected, and whose display earns God's displeasure, such as falsehoods, false beliefs, etc. An example of this usage is in Q2:256:

فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ
بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا

So, whoever disbelieves in (rejects) false deities and believes...
[in God has indeed grasped the firmest handle [of true faith
...one that will never break

[77] Rāghib, *al-Mufradāt*.

iii) *Kufr* that is blameworthy. This refers to covering up something which should be displayed, and whose rejection earns God's displeasure, such as the truth, gratitude, etc. In all but a handful of instances, this is the meaning of the term *kufr* used in the Qur'an. And for the people who display and persistently practice this form of *kufr*, a point is reached where it is of no use trying to bring them to faith. This is the group being referred to in the verse under review. Q2:6 states:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Indeed, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe...

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, this verse declares that God has decided to cut short the arguments and proposals of the disbelievers and give an emphatic response to them, that will follow in the rest of the verses.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

It is important to consider the solemnity of having declared oneself as a Muslim. Thereafter, there can be no compromise in worship or submission to the commands of Allah. Compromise is a strategy of the disbelievers against the believers, as warned in Q68:9:

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ

They desire that you should compromise with them [about their faith and practice], so they [too] would compromise with you.

Whereas God reminds the believer in Q39:3:

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ

Undoubtedly, the religion is for God alone...

Let me reflect whether I worship Allah sometimes and worship something else (for instance, my desires) at other times. In that case, is it not similar to what the disbelievers of Quraysh had proposed?

Do I accept that while there is certainly room to enquire and question before accepting the faith, there is no possibility of rejecting its laws afterwards?

Q33:36 clearly states:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ
وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ

And it is not for a believing man or a believing woman,
when God and His Messenger have decreed a matter,
that they should [thereafter] have any choice in their affair...

VERSE 2

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾

I will never worship what you worship. [2]

2.1 [*Lā a'budu* (لَا أَعْبُدُ, I will never worship)] indicates the rejection of any possibility of future worship. It is not present worship as some have translated, i.e. '*I do not worship what you worship*', which is of little value as a statement, because the Quraysh all knew that the Prophet (s) had nothing to do with their idolatry. In any case, if the present tense was intended, it would be better expressed as '*mā a'budu*'.[78]

2.2 The discussion in this chapter is about worship, and not about the belief in God as the Creator. The Quraysh, like many other idolaters, believed God to be the Creator of the world, but worshipped other gods. Q29:61 states:

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ

And if you asked them, "Who created the heavens and the earth
and subjected the sun and the moon [to their paths],
they would certainly say, "Allah!" Why then have they
deviated [into polytheism and disbelief]?

2.3 To understand the emphatic declaration of the Prophet (s) that he would never worship what they worshipped (*mā ta'budūn*, مَا تَعْبُدُونَ), we will briefly contrast the nature of worship as taught by Islam with the worship and beliefs of the Quraysh.

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[78] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4/808; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/374.

DISCUSSION 1: WORSHIP IN ISLAM (*'IBĀDAH*)

The term *'ibādah* denotes faith in practice. In general terms, it encompasses worship and obedience, and leads to absolute servanthood. Although the Qur'an uses this term for the worship of false deities as well, in the context of Islam, the term signifies worship and veneration of God, and especially performing every act and practice to attain His pleasure and proximity. While performing the ritual acts symbolizes submission and servitude, *'ibādah* extends to the whole life of the believer; it is a state of being, not just confined to periodic acts of worship.

Therefore, *'ibādah* is a comprehensive attitude of worship, including matters such as: sincere intention (*ikhlāṣ*) to attain God's pleasure at every moment, mindfulness of God (*taqwā*) especially in the avoidance of sins, obedience (*iṭā'ah*) of His commandments, pondering (*tafakkur*) over God's plan for mankind, continuous gratitude (*shukr*), supplication and remembrance of God (*du'ā'* and *dhikr*), and trust and reliance in God (*tawakkul*). This leads to the pinnacle of *'ibādah*, which is absolute servanthood (*'ubūdiyyah*).

This was the worship of the Prophet (s) referred to in Surat al-Kāfirūn, and what he taught the Muslims.

DISCUSSION 2: THE BELIEFS AND WORSHIP OF THE QURAYSH

Originally, the religion observed in Makka was monotheistic due to the influence of Prophet Ibrahim (a) and Prophet Isma'il (a). However, with the passage of time, the religion was distorted, especially due to the influence of idolaters in the neighbouring lands where the Makkans went for trade.

Idolatry

The Syrian idol Hubal was brought to Makka by 'Amr b. Luḥay, the chief of the Banu Khuza'ah, who installed it in the Ka'bah and invited people to worship it.

The Qur'an condemns their idolatry in many verses. Just two examples are cited here: Q10:18 states:

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ

And they worship other than God that which neither harms them nor benefits them...

And Q4:117 states:

إِنْ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا إِنَاثًا وَإِنْ يَدْعُونَ إِلَّا شَيْطَانًا مَرِيدًا

Instead of Him, they call upon female deities; and they do not [actually] call upon anything but a rebellious Shaytan!

Later, many other idols were introduced, and paganism spread readily in Arabia. Q53:19, 20 mentions some of the popular idols, three of which were considered to be the figurines of angels whom they worshipped as daughters of Allah:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ ﴿١٩﴾ وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ

Have you considered al-Lāt, and al-'Uzzā, and Manāt, the third – the other one?

The polytheists and idolaters (*mushrikūn*) of the Quraysh believed in Allah as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, but in matters of worship they turned to their idols, asserting that they were partners with Him. They claimed that by worshipping their idols they gained proximity to God. Q39:3 states:

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ
مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ

Undoubtedly, the religion is for God alone; those who take protectors besides him [say,] "We only worship them so that they may bring us nearer to God..."

This idolatry and the baseless innovations that stemmed from it, were the fundamental difference with the message of Islam, which negated every form of polytheism (*shirk*).

Innovation

The Quraysh would give sacrificial and other votive offerings to their idols imagining that they would gain favour thereby. These practices are mentioned in a series of verses in Surat al-An'ām from verse 136 onwards. For example, Q6:136 states:

وَجَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ مِمَّا ذَرَأَ مِنَ الْحَرْثِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ نَصِيبًا فَقَالُوا هَٰذَا لِلَّهِ
بِزَعْمِهِمْ وَهَٰذَا لِشُرَكَائِنَا فَمَا كَانَ لِشُرَكَائِهِمْ فَلَا يَصِلُ إِلَى اللَّهِ

وَمَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ فَهُوَ يَصِلُ إِلَىٰ شُرَكَائِهِمْ سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

And the polytheists assign to God from that which He created of crops and livestock a share [spending it on poor pilgrims], and say, "This is for God", or so they assert, "and this is for our partners [for the upkeep of idols]". But the share of the [so-called] partners does not reach God, and that which they assign to God goes to their partners. Evil is what they decide!

ʿAmr b. Luḥay also instituted the innovations of *baḥīrah, sā'ibah, waṣīlah,* and *ḥām.*

Baḥīrah was a camel that had given birth to five calves, the last of which was a male. Such a camel would have its ear slit, and no one was allowed to slaughter it or ride on it again.

Sā'ibah was a camel that had been dedicated to the idols and was set free to roam as it pleased without being used as a mount or for milk. This was usually after a traveller made a vow that if he returned safely from his journey, he would dedicate his camel to the idols and make it a *sā'ibah.*

Male sheep were slaughtered to appease the idols unless they were born as twins with a female. *Waṣīlah* referred to sheep that gave birth to twins, one male and one female. The female would be the protector (*waṣīlah*) of the male twin, and the Quraysh would not slaughter these animals for meat, or to their idols. Their milk and wool could only be used by the men and not the women.

Ḥām was a male camel that had sired ten offspring. Thereafter, it was referred as *ḥāmī*, and was not used for transport, but allowed to graze freely instead.[79] Q5:103 dismissed these innovations as baseless, stating:

مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ بَحِيرَةٍ وَلَا سَائِبَةٍ وَلَا وَصِيلَةٍ وَلَا حَامٍ وَلَٰكِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

Allah has not ordained [the innovations of] a slit-ear camel (baḥīrah), *or a she-camel let loose for free pasture* (sā'ibah), *or exemptions for twin-births in animals* (waṣīlah), *or stallion-camels freed from work* (ḥām). *But those who disbelieve invent falsehood about God, and most of them do not use reason.*

[79] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 3/390.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

The verse makes clear the declaration of the Prophet (s) that he, and as an extension those who believe in his message, would never worship as the disbelievers worshipped; they would never associate anyone or anything with God, the Almighty.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect if my *'ibādah* is just restricted to ritual acts of worship, or have I also extended the concept to all aspects of my life thus bringing about a continual state of submission (*taslīm*) and servanthood (*'ubūdiyyah*) to God?

The polytheists of Makka believed in God also, yet they worshipped other entities. Let me reflect on whether I truly worship God alone, or do I also turn to abstract idols such as wealth and ego?

VERSES 3 - 5

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾

Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship. [3] *Nor will I ever be a worshipper of what you worshipped.* [4] *Nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship.* [5]

3-5.1 Here the constant worship of One God by the Prophet (s) (as evidenced in verses 2 and 4) is contrasted to the changing practices of the idolaters mentioned in verses 3 and 5. The repetition of the words is not a repetition in meaning.[80]

3-5.2 Other exegetes have stated that the repetition of verses 3 and 5 are both for emphasis, as well as a twin rejection of the two proposals of the Quraysh to worship their gods in alternative years.[81] The emphasis above may be to highlight the fact that this group of people would never worship God, and this is a foretelling of the future from God's hidden knowledge (*'ilm al-ghayb*).[82]

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[80] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 10/421.

[81] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/388.

[82] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/374.

3-5.3 When describing the object of worship, God uses the relative pronoun *mā* (مَا, what, or that which), instead of *man* (مَنْ, who), throughout the chapter. As for the object of worship of the disbelievers, they were lifeless statues and idols, and the correct relative pronoun for inanimate objects is *mā* (what). However, for God, the appropriate pronoun should be *man* (Who). The exegetes have offered some possible reasons for this:

i) That '*mā* (مَا, what)' here, does denote '*man* (مَنْ, who)' or '*alladhī* (الَّذِي, who, or that which)'.

ii) That it could be a reference to the type and manner of worship of the Prophet (s) and the disbelievers; in this case, the pronoun *mā* is *maṣdariyyah*, meaning that it converts the verb that follows it into a verbal noun (*maṣdar*), and the verse would therefore mean, '*Nor will you ever be worshippers in the manner that I worship*', referring to the degree and manner of the worship of the Prophet (s) as dictated by God.

iii) Some exegetes are of the opinion that it is to conform with the phrasing of verse 2: *mā ta'budūn*, '*I will never worship what you worship*' This is similar to other instances in the Qur'an; for example, Q9:67 states:

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ

They forgot God, so God forgot them...

Obviously, God does not forget, and the term in respect to God means 'ignored them', and has been used to keep the uniformity in the comparison.

iv) Finally, by using *mā*, the verse may be referring to the attributes of God, and not His being. Therefore the meaning would be, '*you will never be worshippers of a deity who has the qualities of the Deity that I worship.*' [83]

3-5.4 The two attitudes to worship could never be united. The lofty cognition (*ma'rifah*) of God by the Prophet (s), and the infallibility ('*ismah*) that it cloaked him in would not allow him to entertain any thought other than pure *tawḥīd*.[84] Furthermore, Q6:56 states:

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[83] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/375; Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/388.

[84] Javādī-Āmolī, *Tasnīm*. (Transcript: http://javadi.esra.ir/-/22-10-9931-تفسیم-سوره-کافرون).

قُلْ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

Say: Indeed, I have been forbidden to worship those you invoke besides God...

3-5.5 The hostility and defiant attitude of the leaders of the disbelievers persisted to the end of their lives, just as verse 5 predicted.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSES

The verses make clear that the manner and object of worship of these disbelievers was so different from what was taught by the Prophet (s) that compromise was impossible. The only option was a complete submission to Islam, and this was something that the disbelievers who had idolatry entrenched in them would never accept.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

In addition to contrasting the object of worship of the polytheists and the monotheists, these verses are emphasizing the manner of worship. Therefore, I need to reflect on how much my actions are a reflection of what God wants, rather than what I do due to cultural and social norms, personal desires, ego, etc.

Let us look once more Q51:56, where God states:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I did not create the jinn *and mankind except to worship Me.*

By keeping in mind this broad meaning of *'ibādah*, let me reflect on whether my manner of worship is dictated by God? In other words, am I doing every action in the way He would want me to?

VERSE 6

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

To you is your religion, and to me is my religion! [6]

6.1 Some have considered this verse as a sign of tolerance and religious pluralism, and an acknowledgement of the right of idolaters (or others) to their beliefs. However, this is not the case. The tone of the verse reveals that it is actually a declaration of aversion and disgust at

the evil practice of polytheism. This is clear from the later injunction to banish every polytheist from Makka. Q9:28 states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْمُشْرِكُونَ نَجَسٌ
فَلَا يَقْرَبُوا الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ بَعْدَ عَامِهِمْ هَٰذَا

O believers! Indeed, the polytheists are impure (najas), *so let them not approach the Sacred Mosque after this, their [final] year...*

6.2 *Lakum* (لَكُمْ, for you) is used at the beginning of the verse. When the direct object precedes the verb in this way, it indicates restriction. Therefore, the meaning would be, '*your religion is only for you.*' Similarly, the second phrase means, '*and my religion is only for me*'. Thus, there is no way to reconcile between monotheism and polytheism. No compromise and allowance could be made for the disbelievers, and hence the Prophet (s) informed them flatly that their religions stood apart from one another.

6.3 [*Al-Dīn* (الدِّين, religion)]. As already explained in the *tafsīr* of Surat al-Fātiḥah, in addition to 'religion', the word '*dīn*' also denotes reward and punishment. In this case, the verse would mean, '*you will receive the recompense for your beliefs, and I will receive the recompense for mine*'. A similar statement is made in Q42:15:

اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ
لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

...Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no [need for] argument between us and you. Allah will assemble us together, and to Him is the [final] return.

6.4 This chapter was a clear signal to the disbelievers that the religion of the Prophet (s) was not open to any compromise. Additionally, it was a clear statement that they would never deviate him from his path, nor would they have the blessing of following the right religion themselves. And whether they liked it or not, Islam would prevail over all other religions. Q9:33 states:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ
لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

It is He Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse.

6.5 A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: When you complete the recitation of Surat al-Kāfirūn, then declare, "My religion is Islam, and I am of those who have submitted (*muslimūn*). I will die on this faith and I will be raised on it, if God, the Almighty and Exalted, wills."[85]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, the verse makes clear the two polar positions of monotheism and polytheism. There can be no compromise between the two.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

By instructing the Prophet (s) on how to respond to the disingenuous proposal of some of the Quraysh, this whole chapter highlights the fact that the pure teachings of *tawḥīd* are not compatible with any form of polytheism (*shirk*).

While Islam respects the right of a person to practice their own faith, it does not accept a half-way commitment to the religion, or amalgamation and compromise with other teachings, under the banner of Islam.

Let me reflect on this question: after I have professed my faith in Islam, do I compromise its values in my own beliefs and practice, and thereby create my own version of Islam?

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[85] Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 4/179.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) قَالَ: فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ مِنْ «قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ» فَقُلْ: دِينِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ، وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ، وَعَلَيْهِ أَمُوتُ، وَعَلَيْهِ أُبْعَثُ، إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَتَقَدَّسَ.

SURAT AL-IKHLĀṢ
THE SINCERITY (112)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

سُورَةُ الْإِخْلَاصِ

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾ اللهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: "He is Allah, [the] One. [1] *Allah, [is] the Eternally Independent on Whom all depend.* [2] *He neither begets nor is He begotten,* [3] *and there is no one comparable to Him."* [4]

INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Ikhlāṣ (112) is one of the most well-known and important chapters of the Qur'an. It comprehensively summarizes the fundamental doctrine of *tawḥīd* (monotheism, unicity of God): *tawḥīd al-dhāt* (unity in essence), *tawḥīd al-ṣifāt* (unity of attributes), and *tawḥīd al-afʿāl* (unity in attributing all acts to God), which are practically manifested in *tawḥīd al-ʿibādah* (unicity of deserving worship). And all Islamic teachings on *tawḥīd* arise from the summary in this short chapter.

Surat al-Ikhlāṣ was the 22nd chapter to be revealed.[86] It has four verses, and was revealed in Makka after Surat al-Nās, in the early years of the mission of the Prophet (s).[87]

It is known as Surat al-Ikhlāṣ because it introduces God in a manner that allows the believer to understand His Being and Attributes and aids him in eliminating any trace of polytheism, and thereby become sincere (*mukhliṣ*) in his devotion to God.

It has been referred to in the traditions by several other names, including *al-Tawḥīd* (the Unicity), *al-Asās* (the Foundation), *al-Tajrīd* (the Removal

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[86] Maʿrifat, *ʿUlūm-i Qur'ānī*, p. 90.

[87] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 10/854.

of wrongful notions about God), *al-Ṣamad* (the Independent), and *Qul Huwa Allahu Aḥad*.[88]

LINK TO THE CHAPTERS BEFORE AND AFTER IT

The seven chapters before it – Surat al-Fīl (105) to Surat al-Masad (111) – talk about the various hostilities of the polytheists and disbelievers against the Prophet (s) and Islam, arising from their disagreement about whom and how to worship. This chapter answers this question comprehensively.

The next two chapters then show how to safeguard this understanding of *tawḥīd* by seeking refuge in God from the external forces (mentioned in Surat al-Falaq) and internal forces (mentioned in Surat al-Nās) that would forestall a believer from turning to God.

MERITS OF RECITATION

- It is disliked (*makrūh*) not to recite this chapter at least once in the daily prayers. A narration from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: One who passes a day without reciting Surat *Qul Huwa Allahu Aḥad* in any of his five daily prayers will be told, 'O servant of God! You are not amongst those who have prayed [as they ought to].'[89]
- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: One who recites this chapter is like one who has recited one-third of the Qur'an.[90] Perhaps this is because approximately one-third of the Qur'an discusses aspects of *tawḥīd* (unicity of God), and this chapter comprehensively summarizes the concept.[91]
- A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: Whoever recites the chapter *Qul Huwa Allahu Aḥad* once, is like one who has recited one-third of the Qur'an, one-third of the Tawrāt, one-third of the Injīl, and one-third of the Zabūr.[92]

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/622.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ مَضَى بِهِ يَوْمٌ وَاحِدٌ فَصَلَّى فِيهِ بِخَمْسِ صَلَوَاتٍ، وَلَمْ يَقْرَأْ فِيهَا بِ «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ»، قِيلَ لَهُ: يَا عَبْدَ اللهِ لَسْتَ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ.

[90] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 89/334.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): مَنْ قَرَأَ «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ» عَدَلَتْ لَهُ بِثُلُثِ الْقُرْآنِ.

[91] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/430.

[92] Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 260.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ قَرَأَ «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ» مَرَّةً وَاحِدَةً، فَكَأَنَّمَا قَرَأَ ثُلُثَ الْقُرْآنِ، وَثُلُثَ التَّوْرَاةِ، وَثُلُثَ الْإِنْجِيلِ، وَثُلُثَ الزَّبُورِ.

- A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: It is disliked (*makrūh*) to recite the whole chapter of *Qul Huwa Allahu Aḥad* in one breath [i.e. quickly and without reflection].[93]
- It is reported that when Imam al-Sajjad (a) was asked about *tawḥīd*, he said: "Indeed, God the Almighty knew that at the end of time there will be people who ponder deeply (*muta'ammiqūn*)[94], and so He revealed *Qul Huwa Allahu Aḥad* and the [first six] verses from Surat al-Ḥadīd up to '*wa Huwa 'Alīmun bidhāt al-ṣudūr'*. And whoever goes beyond this will perish [in his faith]."[95]
- A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: Whoever wishes to leave this world having been cleansed of his sins just as gold is purified from rock, leaving it without fault or blemish, and without anyone blaming him for wrongdoing, should recite the Description of the Lord,[96] Blessed and Exalted is He, (i.e. Surat al-Ikhlāṣ) twelve times after the five obligatory prayers.[97]
- A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: Whoever performs his morning prayers and then recites this chapter eleven times will be protected from committing a sin that day, even if Shaytan tries to entice him.[98]

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[93] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/616.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): يُكْرَهُ أَنْ يُقْرَأَ «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ» بِنَفَسٍ وَاحِدٍ.

[94] According to many scholars, this is not a term of praise, but rather refers to people who waste their time in thinking about matters that are beyond human understanding. For further reading, see Mas'ūdī, *Āsīb Shināsī-yi ḥadīth*, p. 215.

[95] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/91.

سُئِلَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ الْحُسَيْنِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) عَنِ التَّوْحِيدِ، فَقَالَ: إِنَّ اللهَ تَعَالَى عَلِمَ أَنَّهُ يَكُونُ فِي آخِرِ الزَّمَانِ أَقْوَامٌ مُتَعَمِّقُونَ، فَأَنْزَلَ اللهُ تَعَالَى «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ اللهُ الصَّمَدُ»، وَالْآيَاتِ مِنْ سُورَةِ الْحَدِيدِ إِلَى قَوْلِهِ «وَهُوَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ»، فَمَنْ رَامَ مَا وَرَاءَ ذٰلِكَ فَقَدْ هَلَكَ.

[96] Surat al-Ikhlāṣ is called 'Description of the Lord' (*nisbat al-rabb*) in some traditions because the Jews came to the Prophet (s) and told him, "Describe to us your Lord," after which Surat al-Ikhlāṣ was revealed. (Ṣadūq, *al-Faqih*, 1/324, footnote 2).

[97] Ṣadūq, *al-Faqīh*, 1/324.

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَخْرُجَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَقَدْ تَخَلَّصَ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ كَمَا يَتَخَلَّصُ الذَّهَبُ الَّذِي لَا كَدَرَ فِيهِ، وَلَا يَطْلُبُهُ أَحَدٌ بِمَظْلَمَةٍ، فَلْيَقُلْ فِي دُبُرِ الصَّلَوَاتِ الْخَمْسِ بَعْدَ الرَّبِّ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى الْبَاقِي عَشْرَةَ مَرَّةً.

[98] Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-A'māl*, p. 45.

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ صَلَّى صَلَاةَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ قَرَأَ «قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ» إِحْدَى عَشْرَةَ مَرَّةً، لَمْ يَتْبَعْهُ فِي ذٰلِكَ الْيَوْمِ ذَنْبٌ، وَإِنْ زَعَمَ أَنْفُ الشَّيْطَانِ.

EXEGESIS

VERSE 1

قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

Say, "He is Allah, (the) One. [1]

1.1 [*Qul* (قُلْ, say)]. This is an instruction to the Prophet (s) to announce the reality that God is One. It is a response to those who questioned the nature of God. History records some of these questioners as: 1) Polytheists in Makka, 2) 'Abdullāh b. Ṣūriyā, a Jew of Madina, 3) 'Abdullāh b. Ubayy, a hypocrite in Madina, and 4) the Christians of Najrān.[99]

1.2 There are five chapters that begin with the command '*qul*' (say): Surat al-Kāfirūn, al-Ikhlāṣ, al-Falaq, and al-Nās, popularly known as *al-qalāqil al-arba'ah*, or the 'four *quls*', and Surat al-Jinn. In fact, the usage of the word '*qul*' (say) in the Qur'an is noteworthy, especially when this command is implicit in every Qur'anic verse, and the Prophet (s) was charged to convey the Divine message anyway. There are several possible reasons for this:

i) It is in response to a question, usually on a matter that has been subject to long and protracted discussions, and now requires a decisive response. In this case the argument was about the nature of God.

ii) It is due to the diligence of the Prophet (s) in quoting the words of God exactly as revealed to him.

iii) When reciting the words, it reinforces the concept of submission to the Divine will and injunction.[100]

1.3 [*Huwa Allah* (هُوَ اللهُ, He is Allah)] is the response to the question, "Who is He?" *Huwa* is added here as a pronoun of case (*ḍamīr al-shā'n*) for emphasis: ([the case is that] He is Allah).[101] This draws attention to the name Allah, which is the Divine name that refers to His essence and encompasses all His attributes. (The name Allah has been discussed in the *tafsīr* of Surat al-Fātiḥah.)

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[99] Ṭabrasī, *al-Bayān*, 10/859.

[100] Shīrāzī, *Namuneh*, 27/386.

[101] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/387.

1.4 [*Aḥad* (أَحَد, One)] is used instead of *wāḥid* as the attribute of God. While both mean 'one', *aḥad* does not denote 'one' in number (followed or preceded by another number, or divisible into smaller fractions), or 'one' in kind (i.e. capable of categorization and analysis), but rather, it denotes 'one' in uniqueness and matchlessness, both physically and in mental conception. Thus, as an attribute, '*aḥad*' can only be used for God.

Imam Ali (a) explained this uniqueness in the course of the battle of Jamal, when a Bedouin Arab asked him, "Do you say God is One, O Commander of the faithful?" The Imam (a) replied, "There are four ways to consider the Unity of God, two of which do not apply to Him, and two of which are affirmed of Him..." The Imam (a) then explained that one in number and one in kind do not apply to God. What applies to Him is One in uniqueness, in that nothing in creation resembles Him, and One in Essence, in that He is indivisible in His existence, in intellectual analysis, and in imagination.[102]

A beautiful statement attributed to Imam Ali (a) states: Everything other than Him when described as 'one', indicates its paucity and smallness.[103]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

The verse teaches that God is One, and nothing can be associated with Him in power, authority, or worship. God is indivisible and hence it is impossible to comprehend Him.

It is only when one sincerely professes and realizes that God is the only One worthy of worship, that he can attain the correct belief in *tawḥīd*, and thereafter abandon and distance himself from the worship and devotion to anything else.

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[102] Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 83.

إِنَّ أَعْرَابِيًّا قَامَ يَوْمَ الْجَمَلِ إِلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، فَقَالَ: يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، أَتَقُولُ إِنَّ اللهَ وَاحِدٌ؟ قَالَ: فَحَمَلَ النَّاسُ عَلَيْهِ، وَقَالُوا: يَا أَعْرَابِيُّ، أَمَا تَرَى مَا فِيهِ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ مِنْ تَقَسُّمِ الْقَلْبِ؟ فَقَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: دَعُوهُ فَإِنَّ الَّذِي يُرِيدُهُ الْأَعْرَابِيُّ هُوَ الَّذِي نُرِيدُهُ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا أَعْرَابِيُّ، إِنَّ الْقَوْلَ فِي أَنَّ اللهَ وَاحِدٌ عَلَى أَرْبَعَةِ أَقْسَامٍ فَوَجْهَانِ مِنْهَا لَا يَجُوزَانِ عَلَى اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَوَجْهَانِ يَثْبُتَانِ فِيهِ، فَأَمَّا اللَّذَانِ لَا يَجُوزَانِ عَلَيْهِ فَقَوْلُ الْقَائِلِ وَاحِدٌ يَقْصِدُ بِهِ بَابَ الْأَعْدَادِ فَهَذَا مَا لَا يَجُوزُ لِأَنَّ مَا لَا ثَانِيَ لَهُ لَا يَدْخُلُ فِي بَابِ الْأَعْدَادِ أَلَا تَرَى أَنَّهُ كَفَرَ مَنْ قَالَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ، وَقَوْلُ الْقَائِلِ هُوَ وَاحِدٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ، يُرِيدُ النَّوْعَ مِنَ الْجِنْسِ، فَهَذَا مَا لَا يَجُوزُ لِأَنَّهُ تَشْبِيهٌ وَجَلَّ رَبُّنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ وَتَعَالَى، وَأَمَّا الْوَجْهَانِ اللَّذَانِ يَثْبُتَانِ فِيهِ، فَقَوْلُ الْقَائِلِ هُوَ وَاحِدٌ لَيْسَ لَهُ فِي الْأَشْيَاءِ شِبْهٌ كَذَلِكَ رَبُّنَا، وَقَوْلُ الْقَائِلِ إِنَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَحَدِيُّ الْمَعْنَى، يَعْنِي بِهِ أَنَّهُ لَا يَنْقَسِمُ فِي وُجُودٍ وَلَا عَقْلٍ وَلَا وَهْمٍ كَذَلِكَ رَبُّنَا عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

[103] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 65.

كُلُّ مُسَمًّى بِالْوَحْدَةِ غَيْرُهُ قَلِيلٌ.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on my understanding of *tawḥīd* and how is it shown in my actions.

Do I understand that worship is due only to Allah, and do I exclude the worship of all else from my practice?

VERSE 2

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

Allah, [is] the Eternally Independent on Whom all depend. [2]

2.1 [*Al-Ṣamad* (الصَّمَد, Eternally Independent)] is a term unique to this chapter and denotes an authority to whom people confidently turn to for everything.[104]

A tradition from Imam al-Husayn (a) states: *Al-Ṣamad* is one who has no hollowness, whose power is limitless, who does not eat or drink, who does not sleep, and whose existence is eternal.[105]

2.2 By using the definite article in the term *al-Ṣamad*, the Qur'an emphasizes that ultimately, everything in the cosmos depends only on God and turns only to Him, while He is completely independent and needless. Q35:15 states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

O mankind! It is you who stand in need of God,
while God is He Who is free of all needs, worthy of all praise.

Furthermore, as emphasized in several verses, everything belongs to Him alone. As an example, Q9:116 states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ
وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

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[104] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/388.

[105] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 3/223.

عَنِ الْحُسَيْنِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): الصَّمَدُ الَّذِي لَا جَوْفَ لَهُ، وَالصَّمَدُ الَّذِي قَدِ انْتَهَى سُؤْدُدُهُ، وَالصَّمَدُ الَّذِي لَا يَأْكُلُ وَلَا يَشْرَبُ، وَالصَّمَدُ الَّذِي لَا يَنَامُ، وَالصَّمَدُ الدَّائِمُ الَّذِي لَمْ يَزَلْ وَلَا يَزَالُ.

Indeed, to God belongs the entire dominion of the heavens
and the earth; He gives life and causes death.
And you have no protector or helper other than God.

2.3 The name Allah is repeated here to show that each of the first two verses are independently able to define God. The first verse defines God by the attribute of His Essence and the second by the attribute of His action.[106]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, God is the eternally needless, while everything other than Him is constantly and utterly dependant on Him for their entire existence; for their creation, sustenance, guidance, and so on.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

If I choose to turn to His creation for my needs instead, then I have deprived myself of what is available with the Creator, unless I accept that they are powerless to do anything without God's leave.

Furthermore, turning to God means turning to a support Who is not limited in ability, love, and wisdom. Q39:36 states:

أَلَيْسَ اللهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ

Is God not sufficient for His servant?

With this in mind, let me reflect on whether I turn to Allah first and foremost before turning to anyone else?

Knowing that God is always available for all his needs fills a believer with confidence and reassurance, and forestalls depression and loss of hope. Q13:28 states:

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah
do hearts find contentment!

Let me reflect on how often I remember Allah and turn to Him for all my needs.

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[106] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/388.

VERSE 3

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾

He neither begets nor is He begotten. [3]

3.1 The essence of God has no concept of addition or subtraction. Nothing detaches from Him because He is not made of parts. He is eternally needless, so He has not been derived from anything either.

3.2 The idolaters believed the angels to be the daughters of God. Several verses mention this contention, for example, Q17:40 states:

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ
إِنَاثًا إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا

Has then your Lord preferred for you sons, and taken for Himself daughters from the angels? Indeed, you utter a grievous saying.

Meanwhile, the Jews believed Prophet 'Uzayr (a) to be God's son, while the Christians maintain that Prophet 'Isa (a) is the son of God. Q9:30 states:

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عُزَيْرٌ ابْنُ اللهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللهِ ذَٰلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ
بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهِئُونَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللهُ أَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ

The Jews say, "'Uzayr is the son of God", and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of God." These are their statements from their [own] mouths. They are imitating the statements of the disbelievers before them. May God destroy them, how are they deluded?

The verse under review emphasizes that His relationship to mankind is that He is their Creator, not their parent.

The verse negates the concept of dualism, pantheism, divine incarnation, or any notions that created beings contain a part of Divinity.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, the verse tells us that God is separate and distinct from every creature. Nothing has detached from His Essence and He was never in need of anything for His Existence.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

God is the Creator of mankind, and ultimately we are all His servants. He is not biased or obliged to anyone. Those who are more honourable in His eyes are the ones who have *taqwā*, as stated in Q49:13:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

...Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God
is the most God-wary amongst you...

Let me reflect on the fact that gaining honour and proximity to God is accessible to me; with my own efforts, I can gain His favour through piety and servitude. In what aspects of my life have I submitted my authority and free will to Allah?

VERSE 4

وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

And there is no one comparable to Him. [4]

4.1 Every verse in this chapter is an explanation and expansion of the verse before it. Thus, '*Say, "He is Allah, (the) One,*' implies '*Allah, (is) the Eternally Independent*'. And in turn, this implies that, '*He neither begets nor is He begotten*, and therefore, '*there is no one comparable to Him*'.

4.2 [*Kufw* (كُفُو, comparable)] means equal, peer or match. Since everything depends on Him, while He is eternally needless, nothing in the cosmos can be even remotely comparable to Him, neither in essence, attribute, nor action. In this regard Q42:11 states:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

...Nothing is like Him...

4.3 The three qualities that have been negated for God in the previous verse and this one – that He does not beget, He was not born, and He has no peer, all explain His attribute, *al-Ṣamad*.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

Generally we understand realities, including Allah, by comparing them with what we know. However, this verse informs us that God cannot be compared to anything that we can describe or imagine.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on how often I project human-like emotions and reactions on God, when He has declared that nothing is comparable to Him.

To worship God and get closer to Him, I need to attain recognition (*ma'rifah*) of Him. The best way to do this is through the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (a), who possessed a great *ma'rifah* of Allah because they were His purified servants, as stated in Q37:159,160:

سُبْحَانَ اللهِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

Glory be to God above what they describe,
except for the purified servants of God.

Let me reflect on how often I study the words and supplications of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) in order to increase my *ma'rifah* of God.

SURAT AL-FALAQ
THE DAYBREAK (113)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

سُورَةُ الْفَلَقِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾
وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ﴿٥﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: "I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak, [1] *from the evil of that which He created,* [2] *and from the evil of the darkness of night when it settles,* [3] *and from the evil of those who blow on knots (magicians),* [4] *and from the evil of an envier when he envies."* [5]

INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Falaq (113) and Surat al-Nās are the last two chapters of the Qur'an. They were revealed in Makka. Surat al-Falaq was the 20th chapter to be revealed.[107] It was revealed either along with, or just before Surat al-Nās. Both were revealed before Surat al-Ikhlāṣ.

In the traditions, they are often jointly referred to as *al-mu'awwidhatān* (the two refuges). One reason for this is that the Prophet (s) would often seek God's protection for his two grandsons al-Hasan (a) and al-Husayn (a) by reciting these two chapters.[108]

The chapters were revealed when the Prophet (s) fell severely ill. In a tradition from Imam al-Baqir (a) we read, "The Prophet (s) fell ill and was suffering a lot of pain. At that time, Jibra'il and Mika'il came to him and

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[107] Ma'rifat, *'Ulūm-i Qur'ānī*, p. 90.

[108] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 60/14.

أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ (صلّى الله عليه وآله) كَانَ كَثِيرًا مَا يُعَوِّذُ الْحَسَنَ وَالْحُسَيْنَ (عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَامُ) بِهَاتَيْنِ السُّورَتَيْنِ.

sat at his head and feet, respectively. Then Jibra'il sought refuge in God by reciting Surat al-Falaq and Mika'il did the same by reciting Surat al-Nās."[109]

In this surah, the Prophet (s) is instructed to seek refuge in God from a variety of external phenomena. God, in His mercy invites the believer to seek calm and peace in His care, and reassures him of His secure protection.

LINK TO THE CHAPTER BEFORE AND AFTER IT

The previous chapter, Surat al-Ikhlāṣ, is the essence of *tawḥīd* and Surat al-Falaq and the next chapter, Surat al-Nās tell us of the forces that attempt to move us away from *tawḥīd*.

Surat al-Falaq talks of the external forces, and Surat al-Nās of the internal forces.

MERITS OF RECITATION

- 'Uqbah bin 'Āmir narrates: The Prophet (s) said to me, "O 'Uqbah, shall I inform you of two surahs which are amongst the best of the Qur'an?" I replied, "Yes indeed, O Messenger of God." Then he taught me the *mu'awwidhatayn* (Surat al-Falaq and Surat al-Nās) and said, "Recite them whenever you wake up or go to sleep."[110]
- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Whoever recites Surat al-Falaq when he goes to sleep will have a great reward. It is a safeguard from every evil and an effective protection against every evil eye.[111]
- A tradition from Imam al-Baqir (a) states: Whoever is disturbed by distressing dreams should recite Surat al-Falaq, Surat al-Nās and Āyat al-Kursī when he goes to sleep.[112]

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[109] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 18/71.

عَنِ الْبَاقِرِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) اشْتَكَى شَكْوَى شَدِيدًا وَوَجِعَ وَجَعًا شَدِيدًا، فَأَتَاهُ جَبْرَائِيلُ وَمِيكَائِيلُ، فَقَعَدَ جَبْرَائِيلُ عِنْدَ رَأْسِهِ وَمِيكَائِيلُ عِنْدَ رِجْلَيْهِ، فَعَوَّذَهُ جَبْرَائِيلُ بِـ«قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ»، وَعَوَّذَهُ مِيكَائِيلُ بِـ «قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ».

[110] Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 4/291.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): يَا عُقْبَةُ، أَلَا أُعَلِّمُكَ سُورَتَيْنِ هُمَا أَفْضَلُ الْقُرْآنِ أَوْ مِنْ أَفْضَلِ الْقُرْآنِ؟ قُلْتُ: بَلَى، يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ. فَعَلَّمَنِي الْمُعَوِّذَتَيْنِ، وَقَالَ: اِقْرَأْهُمَا كُلَّمَا قُمْتَ وَنِمْتَ.

[111] Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, 5/815.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): مَنْ قَرَأَهُمَا عِنْدَ نَوْمِهِ، كَانَ لَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ، وَهِيَ جِرْزٌ مِنْ كُلِّ سُوءٍ، وَهِيَ رُقْيَةٌ نَافِعَةٌ وَجِرْزٌ مِنْ كُلِّ عَيْنٍ نَاظِرَةٍ.

[112] Ṣadūq, *al-Faqih*, 1/469.

عَنِ الْبَاقِرِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ أَصَابَهُ فَزَعٌ عِنْدَ مَنَامِهِ، فَلْيَقْرَأْ إِذَا أَوَى إِلَى فِرَاشِهِ الْمُعَوِّذَتَيْنِ وَآيَةَ الْكُرْسِيِّ .

EXEGESIS

VERSE 1

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾

Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak. [1]

1.1 The first verse begins with a command [*qul* (قُلْ, say)], and by repeating the word, the individual acknowledges that seeking God's protection will first require obedience to His commands. Although the command is directed to the Prophet (s), it thereafter includes all the Muslims, instructing them to seek refuge in God alone.

1.2 [*A'ūdhu* (أَعُوذُ, I seek refuge)]. The verb is derived from *'ādha*, meaning to take refuge or seek protection. It is human nature to seek protection from an enemy with someone or something stronger than themselves. Asking His protection reminds man of his own frailty and need for God, Who is the only One who can truly protect him.

1.3 [*Rabb* (رَب, Lord, Sustainer)]. We have discussed this term in the *tafsīr* of the second verse of Surat al-Fātiḥah.

1.4 [*Falaq* (فَلَق, separation)] comes from the root *falaqa*, meaning to cleave or separate one thing from another. Because dawn cleaves the curtain of night, *falaq* is used for daybreak. In Q6:96, the term is used in that meaning:

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ

He causes the day to break...

1.5 Commentators are of the opinion that *falaq* may refer to all living creatures and plants because each comes from the splitting of a seed or germ cell. In Q6:95, God uses the word *falaq* in this sense in the verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَالِقُ الْحَبِّ وَالنَّوَىٰ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَمُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتِ مِنَ الْحَيِّ

Indeed, God is the cleaver of grain-seed and the date-stone; He brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living...

1.6 Others have given a wider meaning to *falaq*, to include the creation of the cosmos, in the sense that the curtain of non-existence was split by God to create every being.[113]

1.7 All these meanings point to the grandeur of God, Who has fashioned these marvellous phenomena, and in Whom we are asked to seek refuge.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, God is the only Protector against any harm that can come to us from His creation, and this verse instructs us to therefore seek refuge in Him.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

By using the quality, *al-Rabb*, God reminds us that He is the true Sustainer of the entire cosmos.

Let me reflect on whether I then trust in God, or turn to something or someone other than Him for protection?

VERSE 2

مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾

From the evil of that which He created. [2]

2.1 [*Sharr* (شَرّ, evil)] here does not mean that the creation of God is essentially evil; in fact, everything has been created in its best form. Q32:7, states:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

[The Mighty, the Merciful] He who made perfect everything that He created...

2.2 Evil is the absence of good. It is an aberration that occurs when a creature deviates from the purpose of its creation and goes astray, or distances itself from the Creator, or when creation is used in a wrongful manner. For example, the venom, sharp teeth, or talons of animals are their natural defence against their enemy or a means to secure food; if they are used for this purpose, it is not evil.

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[113] See: Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/458.

2.3 *'From the evil of that which He created'*: This informs us that all of creation has the potential to cause harm, even for example, the sun, water, etc. The intricate and necessary connection between all entities in God's creation is bound to bring some evil. Believers are encouraged by this verse to maintain their link to the rest of creation to achieve goodness and benefit, but to be reassured by the fact that God will protect them from any evil that comes about thereby.

2.4 Unlike the creation, which has the potential to be evil, the Creator never harms. Even in the chastisement of God there is a favour of purification for the one being punished. Q55:43-45 state:

هَٰذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا
وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ آنٍ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

This is Hell, which the criminals denied. They shall wander between it and scalding hot water. So which of the favours of your Lord will you two (men and jinn*) deny?*

2.5 Similarly, many occurrences are not inherently evil, although they may seem so, because despite the experience being unpleasant, man is thereby guided or reminded of his purpose in this world.

2.6 After this general mention of evil, three specific instances are highlighted:

i) the evil of the darkness of night,

ii) the evil of the magicians, and

iii) the evil of the envious.

This is possibly because human beings are relatively unaware of these dangers and more vulnerable to them.[114]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, the verse asks us to seek refuge in God from the potential evil inherent in every created being.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Evil occurs when we deviate from the purpose of our creation and use what we have been given in a wrongful manner.

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[114] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/394.

Let me reflect on whether I have understood the purpose of my creation and use all that I have to realise that purpose.

Everyone has a potential to cause harm when they become detached and distant from God.

Let me reflect on what I have in my life which is potentially evil, which distances me from God, and thereby causes me harm.

VERSE 3

وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾

And from the evil of the darkness of night when it settles. [3]

3.1 The attribution of evil to night-time is because the darkness of night assists those with evil intent to commit malicious acts. Indeed, such acts happen much more in the night than in the day. Additionally, a person who is attacked by someone or something malevolent is much more vulnerable at night than in the day.

3.2 [*Ghasaq* (غَسَق, darkness)] refers to night when it grows dark. For example, Q17:78 uses the term when referring to the end of the time of the night (*'ishā'*) prayer:

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَىٰ غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ

Establish prayer from the declining of the sun
until the darkness (ghasaq) *of night...*

Ghāsiq could also refer to every creature with an evil intent.

3.3 [*Waqab* (وَقَب, settle)] means to enter and settle. However, it also means a hole or ditch (used to trap).

3.4 If we consider these meanings for *ghāsiq* and *waqab*, then the translation would be, '*From the evil of every malevolent creature when it sets its trap.*'[115]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In this verse, we are instructed to seek God's refuge from those who would seek the cover of darkness, or malevolence hidden in their heart, to carry out their evil intent.

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[115] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/460.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Let me reflect on how I protect myself from the evil of those who would seek to harm me.

One of the greatest evils is the darkness of misguidance, and indeed, the term 'darknesses' is sometimes used in the Qur'an to mean lack of guidance. Q2:257 states:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

God is the Guardian of the believers; He takes them out of the darknesses into the light. As for the disbelievers, their guardians are satans; they take them out of the light into the darknesses. They are the inmates of the fire, and will abide therein forever.

Keeping this in mind, let me reflect on how to build my connection with God so that He becomes my Guardian, and takes me out of my darknesses, and leads me towards the light.

VERSE 4

وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾

And from the evil of those who blow on knots (magicians). [4]

4.1 *Nafatha* (نفث) means to spit or sputter, and since this is done by blowing from the mouth, the word is similar in meaning to *nafakha*, which means to blow.

4.2 [*al-Naffāthāt* (النَّفَّاثات, magicians)] refers to the women who were witches and sorceresses, who would tie knots on strings, then recite some words and blow or spit on them to effect magic and cast spells on their victims.

4.3 However, some commentators believe that this may also refer to women who spread doubts and rumours in the minds of people by making cunning suggestions.[116]

4.4 The Qur'an clearly mentions that people who resort to magic will never ultimately achieve their aims. Q20:69 states:

[116] Shīrāzī, *Namūneh*, 27/461.

وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاحِرُ حَيْثُ أَتَىٰ

No matter where he comes (attacks) from,
a magician will not be successful.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, we are instructed to seek God's refuge from those who would use magic or rumour mongering to harm us.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

When we encounter something that appears paranormal, do we remind ourselves that seeking refuge in God is more powerful than any effect that such activity can have on us?

VERSE 5

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ﴿٥﴾

And from the evil of an envier when he envies. [5]

5.1 This refers to the evil of the envier when he manifests his jealousy. By using [*idhā* (إِذَا, when)], the verse informs us that when someone harbours malicious envy, it will always manifest itself.

Indeed, the first murder in the history of man, when Qābīl killed his brother Hābīl, was due to envy and jealousy.

5.2 Jealousy is a favoured tool of Shaytan, frequently used by him to distract mankind and halt their progress towards God. There are many traditions warning against this evil, for example:

A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: Jealousy is the prison of man's soul.[117]

And also: I have not seen any oppressor resembling the oppressed more than the jealous one; his spirit is exhausted, his heart is restless, and his sorrow is perpetual.[118]

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[117] Āmudī, *Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, p. 372.

عَنِ الْإِمَامِ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): الْحَسَدُ حَبْسُ الرُّوحِ.

[118] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 73/256.

عَنِ الْإِمَامِ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَا رَأَيْتُ ظَالِمًا أَشْبَهَ بِمَظْلُومٍ مِنَ الْحَاسِدِ: نَفَسٌ دَائِمٌ، وَقَلْبٌ هَائِمٌ، وَحُزْنٌ لَازِمٌ.

DISCUSSION: *ḤASAD* (ENVY)

Ḥasad (حَسَد, envy), is the verbal noun from the root *ḥasada*. It is a concept that has no exact equivalent in translation, but the words envy and jealousy are used to convey its meaning. Envy means coveting something possessed by someone else, usually with feelings of resentment against them. Jealousy refers to the destructive negative emotion and action caused by fear of losing something that one already possesses. *Ḥasad* has been defined as follows:

i) To resent the fact that someone else possesses a certain blessing,

ii) Wanting a blessing to be removed from another individual,

iii) Wanting for oneself a blessing that someone else possesses.[119]

The first two forms of *ḥasad* described above are malicious in nature, while the third can be malicious or praiseworthy. When it is praiseworthy, it called *ghibṭah* (غِبطَة, admiring or constructive envy). *Ghibṭah* has been defined as the aspiration to acquire an admirable quality possessed by someone else, without any desire for that person to lose it.[120]

Ḥasad has been condemned in the traditions, while *ghibṭah* has been recommended. For example, a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: Indeed, a believer admires but does not envy, while a hypocrite displays envy (*ḥasad*) but not admiration (*ghibṭah*).[121]

Ḥasad stems from misunderstanding the wisdom behind God's allocation and restriction of blessings. It is destructive in nature, keeping a person absorbed in bitterness and negativity, and making them physically and spiritually unwell. A tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: The wellbeing of the body lies in the absence of *ḥasad*.[122]

Conversely, *ghibṭah* is a constructive and healthy emotion motivating a person to emulate an admirable trait in another person, resulting in self-improvement. In this regard, a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states:

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[119] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*.

[120] Narāqī, *Jāmi' al-Sa'ādāt*, 2/197.

هِيَ تَمَنِّي مِثْلِ مَا لِلْمَغْبُوطِ، مِنْ غَيْرِ أَنْ يُرِيدَ زَوَالَهُ عَنْهُ.

[121] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/307.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ يَغْبِطُ وَلَا يَحْسُدُ، وَالْمُنَافِقُ يَحْسُدُ وَلَا يَغْبِطُ.

[122] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying no.253.

صِحَّةُ الْجَسَدِ مِنْ قِلَّةِ الْحَسَدِ.

Whoever has a day better than his previous day is worthy of admiration (*maghbūṭ*).[123]

The evil of the envier (*ḥāsid*)

When the *ḥāsid* manifests his *ḥasad*, great harm can result. The Qur'an mentions several instances of this, for example:

i) Q12:5 states the warning of Prophet Yaqub (a) to his young son Yusuf (a):

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا

He said: My dear son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers, or they will concoct a plot against you...

ii) Q5:27 describes the fratricide of Qābīl, which rose from his *ḥasad* of his brother Hābīl:

إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ

... When they both offered a sacrifice [to God], and it was accepted from one of them but not accepted from the other. (Qābīl) said, "I will certainly kill you."...

This is why the believer is instructed in Surat al-Falaq to seek refuge in God from the evil of the *ḥāsid* when he manifests his *ḥasad*.

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, we are instructed to seek God's refuge from the evil that may befall us due to the jealousy and envy of others.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Both envy and jealousy arise when one does not have faith in God's wisdom in allocating bounties to individuals. In Q4:54, God asks:

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَىٰ مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ

Do they envy other people because of what God has allocated to them out of His grace?

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[123] Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, p. 342.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ كَانَ آخِرُ يَوْمَيْهِ خَيْرَهُمَا، فَهُوَ مَغْبُوطٌ.

God allocates out of His grace in order to bring the believers closer to Him and to help them reach their potential, perfection and thereby, Paradise.

Keeping this in mind, do I fully understand, believe, and accept this wisdom?

Let me look at what I have, rather than what He has given to others. This will allow me freedom from the shackles of envy and allow me to progress on my journey towards Him.

SURAT AL-NĀS
THE PEOPLE (114)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

سُورَةُ النَّاسِ

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلٰهِ النَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾ مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ﴿٥﴾ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ﴿٦﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, [1] *the King of mankind,* [2] *the God of mankind.* [3] *From the evil of the slinking whisperer (Shaytan),* [4] *who whispers into the breasts of mankind.* [5] *From amongst the jinn and mankind."* [6]

INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Nās (114) is the last chapter in the Qur'anic codex. It was revealed in Makka, either along with, or after, Surat al-Falaq and before Surat al-Ikhlāṣ. It was the 21st chapter to be revealed.[124]

In this chapter, just as in Surat al-Falaq, the Prophet (s) is instructed originally, and so are the Muslims by extension, to seek refuge in Allah, the Lord, the King and the God of mankind, this time from the insidious whisperings and malevolence of Shaytan.

Shaytan is a sworn enemy to man. Q7:16,17 quote his declaration:

قَالَ فَبِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

He (Shaytan) said: Because You have sent me astray, I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from

[124] Ma'rifat, *'Ulūm-i Qur'ānī*, p. 90.

before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them grateful [to You].

This chapter, which shows the only way to counter Shaytan's threat, is a very appropriate ending for the Book of God, which allows the believer to thwart all evil under the protection and guidance of God.

LINK TO THE CHAPTER BEFORE AND AFTER IT

Surat al-Falaq speaks of protection from a variety of external phenomena, that are outside man's control. Surat al-Nās speaks of seeking protection from the evil that is incited within man's own heart and soul.

After completing the recitation of the entire Qur'an, it is highly recommended to begin the recitation of the Qur'an again. The last chapter emphasizes the same concepts mentioned in the first chapter, that, God is the *Rabb*, *Malik* (or *Mālik*) and the only deity worthy of worship.

MERITS OF RECITATION

- A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Whoever recites this surah over a painful area will receive relief with God's permission; it is a cure for whoever recites it.[125]
- A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: Whoever recites this surah in his home every night will be secure from the *jinn*, and from [satanic] whisperings. Whoever writes it down and makes small children wear it as an amulet, they shall be protected from the *jinn*, with the permission of God Almighty.[126]

EXEGESIS

VERSE 1 - 3

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَٰهِ النَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾

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[125] Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, 5/817.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): مَنْ قَرَأَ هٰذِهِ السُّورَةَ عَلَى أَلَمٍ سَكَنَ بِإِذْنِ اللهِ تَعَالَى، وَهِيَ شِفَاءٌ لِمَنْ قَرَأَهَا.

[126] Ibid.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَنْ قَرَأَهَا فِي مَنْزِلِهِ كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ أَمِنَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْوَسْوَاسِ، وَمَنْ كَتَبَهَا وَعَلَّقَهَا عَلَى الْأَطْفَالِ الصِّغَارِ حُفِظُوا مِنَ الْجَانِّ بِإِذْنِ اللهِ تَعَالَى.

Say: "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, [1] *the King of mankind,* [2] *the God of mankind.* [3]

1-3.1 [*Qul* (قُلْ, say)]. We have discussed the usage of this term in the *tafsīr* of Surat al-Falaq.

1-3.2 [*A'ūdhu* (أَعُوذُ, I seek refuge)]. In addition to what was discussed about this term in the *tafsīr* of the previous chapter, usually, an individual will turn to one of three refuges: either to a person who is his nurturer and nourisher, perhaps someone who has looked after his needs all his life (*rabb*), or to a person who has power and authority (*malik*), or to God Himself (*Ilāh*).

1-3.3 Although Allah is the Lord, King, and God of the entirety of creation, these verses only specify His authority over mankind. This maybe because man is the noblest of God's creation,[127] or that he is the only creature in whose heart Shaytan whispers.[128]

1-3.4 The only way to fight this enemy, whose form and weapons cannot be easily detected, is to constantly seek refuge in the safe haven of God, so that we remain secure from him. Q7:200 instructs:

وَإِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Shaytan,
then seek refuge in God. Indeed, he is all-Hearing, all-Knowing.

God is the safest refuge because He is the true Sustainer (*Rabb*), and caters for all the needs of His servants. He is also the all-Powerful sovereign (*Malik*), and can easily avert the evil of others; and unlike false deities, He is the only Deity worthy of the worship of mankind (*Ilāh*).

1-3.5 Seeking the protection of God begins with words, after which actions must follow. *Rabb* reminds us that God is the One Who sustains and protects us unconditionally, *Malik* reminds us that He has authority over us, so we are obliged to obey Him and to submit to Him fully in all aspects of our lives, and *Ilāh* reminds us that He is our God, and we need to worship Him as a sign of gratitude for His blessings.

1-3.6 Asking for His protection reminds man of his own frailty and need for God, Who is the only One capable of truly protecting him.

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[127] Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 32/376.

[128] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4/823.

1-3.7 These three qualities of God, lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), sovereignty (*malikiyyah*), and Godship (*ulūhiyyah*) have been chosen out of God's many qualities because they are directly linked to the nurturing of man, and are the focus of the whispers of Shaytan, who wishes to make man consider these qualities for other than God.

They are possibly listed in this order because *rubūbiyyah* is the closest quality to that of man, and is not reserved for God only. Anyone who nourishes and looks after someone else is their *rabb* (for example one's mother). *Malikiyyah* is a higher level of authority, and reserved for a few people who are in power and exercise control over many individuals. Finally, God Himself is the absolute Authority over all creation. This sequence leads man to consider authorities that are many to One, Final Authority; from multiplicity to Unity. These authorities are in a sequence of increasing power and ability, and at every stage, God emphasizes that it is He who is the ultimate refuge.

1-3.8 There may be a *rabb* one chooses who wants to love and nurture us, but has no power. There may be a *malik* who has power but no compassion or care for us. That is why only God is the true refuge Who is all-Loving, all-Caring, and all-Powerful.

1-3.9 The three phrases, '*rabb al-nās*' (رَبِّ النَّاس), '*malik al-nās*' (مَلِكِ النَّاس), and '*ilāh al-nās*' (إِلٰهِ النَّاس), have been made distinct from each other without using the conjunction 'and' between them. This is because they signify three independent reasons why God is the best refuge to repel evil. Furthermore, any one of these qualities would suffice to repel the evil, depending on whether it pertains to nourishment, sovereignty, or ultimate authority.[129]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSES

The message in these verses is that Allah is the true Lord and Nourisher of mankind. It is He who has the ultimate power and sovereignty, and it is He who is the One, true God of creation. Q39:6 states:

ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ

... That is Allah, your Lord (Rabb); *to Him belongs sovereignty* (mulk). *There is no god* (ilāh) *besides him...*

[129] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 20/396.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Seeking refuge in God is not by the tongue only; it should be a belief in the heart, and shown in one's actions as well.

A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: When you recite, '*I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,*' remind yourself that you are [truly and completely] seeking refuge in the Lord of mankind.[130]

Keeping this in mind, let me reflect on:

i) Who is my *rabb*? Even as I rely on others, do I keep in mind that their help is only through the permission of God and through His power? Do I rely on myself and imagine that I do not need anyone?

ii) Who is my *malik*? Which authority do I look up to? Am I the slave of God or do I consider myself free to act in whatever way I please?

iii) Who is my *Ilāh*? Whom do I worship? Do I worship my own desires?

VERSES 4, 5

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ﴿٥﴾

From the evil of the slinking whisperer (Shaytan), [4] *who whispers into the breasts of mankind.* [5]

4-5.1 The verses do not warn of just the whispering, rather they warn of the evil of the whisperer himself, whose whispering is the cornerstone of his strategy. Q35:6 warns:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا
إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ

Indeed, Shaytan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy. He only calls to (invites) his party so that they may [ultimately] become inmates of the Fire."

4-5.2 [*Waswasa* (وَسْوَسَ, whispering)] refers to the suggestion of a baseless or harmful idea into the mind of someone. It has come to refer primarily to the poisonous whisperings of Shaytan. One of the ways in which Shaytan attacks man is that he prepares his plots and

[130] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 60/246.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ «قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ» فَقُلْ فِي نَفْسِكَ: أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ.

snares secretly by continually whispering into the hearts of people, inciting thoughts of evil, until they unwittingly fall into his trap.

However, it is also worth noting that once Shaytan has affected it, man's own soul whispers to him also. Q50:16 states:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ
وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

Indeed We have created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and we are closer to him than [his] jugular vein.

4-5.3 [*Al-Khannās* (الْخَنَّاس, disappearing)] refers to something that disappears after coming into view. Therefore, the verses denote the continual visitation of Shaytan, who comes and goes into the heart of man, continually attempting to get him to commit evil. Or it could mean that he disappears when the person remembers God.

A tradition from the Prophet (s) states: Indeed, Shaytan places his snout [sniffing] over the hearts of the children of Adam (a); when they remember Allah, the Glorified, he retreats, but when they forget, he overwhelms their hearts. That is the slinking whisperer (*waswās al-khannās*).[131]

4-5.4 [*Ṣudūr* (صُدُور, chests)], (sing. *ṣadr*), means chest, within which is located the heart. The heart is used in the Qur'an as the locus of man's perception and conscience. Perhaps chest has been used here because Shaytan can come close but will only enter the heart if allowed in. And if this happens, then man is in great peril. In this regard, a tradition from Imam Ali (a) states: They (the hypocrites) relied on Shaytan in their affairs, and he made them his partners [in misguiding others]. He laid eggs [of rebellion] in their chests and hatched them. He gradually insinuated himself into their hearts. He saw through their eyes, and spoke through their tongues. Thus, he led them on the path of sinfulness, and beautified for them that which was foul...[132]

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[131] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 60/94.

عَنِ الرَّسُولِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ): إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ وَاضِعٌ خَطْمَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ)، فَإِذَا ذَكَرَ اللهَ سُبْحَانَهُ خَنَسَ، وَإِنْ نَسِيَ الْتَقَمَ قَلْبَهُ، فَذَلِكَ الْوَسْوَاسُ الْخَنَّاسُ.

[132] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 7.

اتَّخَذُوا الشَّيْطَانَ لِأَمْرِهِمْ مَلَاكًا، وَاتَّخَذَهُمْ لَهُ أَشْرَاكًا، فَبَاضَ وَفَرَّخَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ، وَدَبَّ وَدَرَجَ فِي حُجُورِهِمْ، فَنَظَرَ بِأَعْيُنِهِمْ، وَنَطَقَ بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ، فَرَكِبَ بِهِمُ الزَّلَلَ، وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْخَطَلَ.

4-5.5 A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: When Q3:135 was revealed,

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ

And those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember God and seek forgiveness for their sins...

Iblis went up on a mountain in Makka called Thawr, and called out to his minions at the top of his voice. They all assembled, and asked, "O Chief, why have you summoned us?" He replied, "This verse has been revealed, so which amongst you will suffice against it?" One of the satans arose and volunteered, describing his plan. Iblis replied, "You are not up to the task." Another rose up and outlined his plan, but Iblis told him the same thing. Then, a satan called Waswās al-Khannās said, "I will suffice. I will make them false promises and distract them with worldly aspirations, so that they fall into the habit of sin. Thereafter, I will make them neglectful about seeking forgiveness." Iblis declared, "You are the most suited to this task!", and appointed him to it until the Day of Judgment."[133]

SUMMARY OF THE VERSES

In summary, these verses warn that the believer is always the subject of the attack of Shaytan, who continually attempts to deviate him by whispering thoughts of evil conduct into his heart and mind. But it is the believer's choice whether to listen and follow or not.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

It is important to remember that while one cannot stop the interference of Shaytan and his whispering, one has the choice whether to allow it into the heart or not. One can stop him by remembering God.

Let me reflect on my last sin; was it due to allowing the whispering of Shaytan to enter my heart? Or was it from a trait that I had already established in my heart? Or was it both?

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[133] Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 465.

عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): لَمَّا نَزَلَتْ هَذِهِ الْآيَةُ «وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ» صَعِدَ إِبْلِيسُ جَبَلًا بِمَكَّةَ، يُقَالُ لَهُ ثَوْرٌ، فَصَرَخَ بِأَعْلَى صَوْتِهِ بِعَفَارِيتِهِ، فَاجْتَمَعُوا إِلَيْهِ، فَقَالُوا: يَا سَيِّدَنَا لِمَ دَعَوْتَنَا؟ قَالَ: نَزَلَتْ هَذِهِ الْآيَةُ فَمَنْ لَهَا؟ فَقَامَ عِفْرِيتٌ مِنَ الشَّيَاطِينِ فَقَالَ: أَنَا لَهَا بِكَذَا وَكَذَا، قَالَ: لَسْتَ لَهَا، فَقَامَ آخَرُ، فَقَالَ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ: لَسْتَ لَهَا، فَقَالَ الْوَسْوَاسُ الْخَنَّاسُ: أَنَا لَهَا، قَالَ: بِمَاذَا؟ قَالَ: أُعِدُهُمْ وَأُمَنِّيهِمْ حَتَّى يُوَاقِعُوا الْخَطِيئَةَ، فَإِذَا وَاقَعُوا الْخَطِيئَةَ أَنْسَيْتُهُمُ الِاسْتِغْفَارَ، فَقَالَ: أَنْتَ لَهَا، فَوَكَّلَهُ بِهَا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ.

VERSE 6

مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ﴿٦﴾

From amongst the jinn *and mankind.* [6]

6.1 The verse mentions *jinn* before mankind, perhaps because they form the main army of Shaytan. However, the verse clearly informs us that there are some amongst mankind who are so deviant that they themselves are satans, serving the cause of Iblis, which is to deviate man from God.

A tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: There is no heart except that it has two ears; one is open to a guiding angel, and the other to a deceptive satan. One counsels him [to goodness] while the other restrains him [from goodness]. Similarly, there are satans from mankind, who encourage people to sin, just like the satans from the *jinn.*[134]

DISCUSSION: SHAYTAN

The name Shaytan is derived from the root *shaṭana*, denoting something that is evil, lowly, and driven away. It is a general name of any creature (from *jinn* and mankind) who possesses these qualities,[135] and Iblis is the particular Shaytan who refused to bow to Prophet Adam (a).

Initially Iblis was a devout worshipper of God, to the extent that he was admitted into the high ranks of angels. However, he harboured within himself a deep-rooted arrogance which manifested itself as jealousy when he was asked to bow to the first human being. According to his limited knowledge, he thought himself superior because he compared his external form (fire) with that of Adam (a) (clay).

After being driven away from Paradise, he swore to take revenge on the children of Adam (a) by deviating them from the path of God. Q15:39 quotes his oath:

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

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[134] Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 60/245.

عن الصادق (عليه السلام): ما من قلب إلا وله أذنان، على أحدهما مَلَكٌ مُرشِدٌ، وعلى الآخر شيطانٌ مُغْوٍ، هذا يأمُرُهُ وهذا يزجُرُهُ، كذلك من الناس شيطانٌ يحمل الناس على المعاصي كما يحمل الشيطانُ من الجن.

[135] The term is also used in many traditions for harmful creatures not visible to the eye, such as bacteria.

My Lord! Because You led me astray, I shall make [evil and disobedience] attractive to them on earth, and I will mislead them all."

SUMMARY OF THE VERSE

In summary, Shaytan is served in his mission of deviating the progeny of Adam (a) by both man and *jinn.*

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

One should distance oneself from the ways of Shaytan, the assemblies of satanic practices, and satanic thoughts and plans. Q24:21 states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ
وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

O Believers! Do not follow the footsteps of the Shaytan. Whoever follows the footsteps of the Shaytan, he commands [him] towards indecency and wrongdoing...

Let me reflect on whether:

1. I am constantly aware of the whispering of Shaytan?
2. I associate with those amongst mankind who 'whisper' to me?
3. Most importantly, do I 'whisper' to others?

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